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LECTURES AND ADDRESSES  
BY  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE



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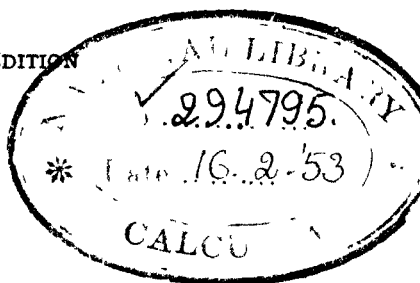
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LECTURES & ADDRESSES  
BY  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

*Selected from the Speeches  
of the Poet*

BY  
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INDIAN EDITION



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## PREFACE

THIS little volume is an attempt to bring together in a convenient form a selection from the lectures and addresses of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore with a view to presenting to the reader a coherent account of his life, thought, convictions and ideals.

In 1914, when Mr. Yeats found that the prose translations of the poet's *Gītānjali* had stirred his blood as nothing had for years, he could not help regretting that he knew nothing of their author's life nor of the movements that had made them possible. Scarcely had anyone at that time, outside Bengal, heard even the name of the poet-philosopher. To-day the case is very different : his name is greeted with enthusiasm, wonder and reverence in almost every part of the civilized world, and pictures of him are to be found in thousands of homes. In most of the great cities of both hemispheres surging crowds have been held spell-bound by the melody of his voice, even when they did not understand the language of his addresses or recitations ; larger numbers have been fascinated by his refined and well-chiselled lineaments, which, together with his silver locks, his flowing beard, his eyes full of mystic inspiration, and his long and loose robes, have recalled

to their minds the vision of a prophet of Judea or of a seer of ancient India. No poet, ancient or modern, has been received during his lifetime with the honour and respect with which Dr. Tagore has been greeted, whether in the West or in the East, and there is scarcely any cultivated language into which some, at least, of his works have not been translated.

The almost world-wide manifestation of regard for the 'Poet Laureate of Asia' and of interest in his work has created a universal desire to know all that is possible of his person, his home, surroundings, activities and, especially, of his opinions on those social, moral and political problems of the day which are exercising the mind of mankind—of the man in the street just as much as of the social and political worker or of the thinker in academic centres of learning. There is an innate instinct in man which urges him to find out as much as he can of the life and thought of those whom he reverences, and he regards no fact as too irrelevant or insignificant for his enquiry. The craving to get at the details of a man's career and his views was never so insistent as it is at the present day, perhaps because of the efforts, not wholly irreproachable, which are made by the press of to-day to satisfy the appetite for such fare.

This volume is an attempt to meet this desire in a manner which we trust will be helpful to the class of reader who seeks to understand the mind and art of an author, rather than to flit over mere *personalia*, the interest in which cannot but be transitory. Any value which it may possess lies in the

fact that the details of the poet's life, opinions and views, here presented, are in the author's own words.

Many biographical studies of the poet have been published, and the number of articles and monographs claiming to explain the sources of his poetic appeal and the character of his philosophical belief and moral teaching is legion; brilliant and not wholly unconvincing though many of them are, none will venture to deny that nothing can surpass in truth and fidelity a man's straightforward and disinterested exposition of his own personality and creed.

In making the selection from the lectures and addresses we have, therefore, confined ourselves exclusively to such speeches of Dr. Tagore's as give an insight into his views and individuality. It is he who speaks and tells us of himself. The ancient precept of the oracle is 'Know thyself'; we thought that its most fitting complement would be 'Interpret thyself.'

In these speeches the poet-philosopher tells us of his early life and of the kind of education he received; he describes his school at Shanti-Niketan to which he has consecrated his energy and wisdom, the methods of teaching employed there, and the nature of the discipline enforced. He then expounds, as usual, with a wealth of analogy and illustration, his views on the much-vexed question as to what constitutes progress and civilization, and defines the great distinction that exists between the connotations of these two terms. In the next speech he denounces



modern industrialism, and does not tire of reiterating the obvious, but, at present, obscured truth, that 'Construction' and 'Creation' are two distinct processes, or, to speak less figuratively, that 'man must realize that this world is not a storehouse of mechanical power, but a habitation of man's soul with its eternal music of beauty and its light of a divine presence.' As a sequel to this view and immediately flowing from it, we have his answer to the question 'What is Art?' Then follows his conception of Nationality as applicable to India. This naturally rouses us to expect his views on the place of Internationalism in present-day world-polity, and our expectations are not disappointed. In the last speech but one Dr. Tagore proclaims his trust in humanity and his conviction that the meeting of the human races will eventually be translated into the Unity of Man, and, in his final address, he delivers in a clarion voice the message that all possessions and achievements are of no account unless the human soul finds its peace in God.

Dr. Tagore is not only a great poetical force but a moral force. What is more, there is a dualism and something more than a dualism in him : he is not only the Poet Laureate of Asia and a great world personality, but he is the spokesman of India and the living symbol of her culture. Never was a keener desire manifested than at the present day by the West to understand the hoary East, especially India, with her immemorial culture ; and never in her secular history was there greater anxiety on the part of the whole of the East, and even more so in the

case of India, to have her past and her intellectual and moral attainments adequately interpreted to the nations who dwell on the other half of the globe. India and her peoples, therefore, cannot but deem themselves fortunate that, at this juncture, Dr. Tagore imposed upon himself the mission of interpreting the soul of India to the rest of the world, carrying with him the story of her great and magnificent past—her achievements in art, philosophy, and ethics—as his country's gifts to the different parts of the world he has been visiting. In this volume it will not be difficult to detect utterances in which the poet and seer proclaims aloud and with insistence the æsthetic, philosophical, political and moral standards which India stood for in the past and which, he thinks, she ought to stand for, even at the present day, notwithstanding the changes that have since taken place in the political distribution of the globe and in the scientific achievements of some of its peoples.

Speeches delivered at different times, in various countries and places, and at various stages in the growth of the poet's ever-expanding mind, on subjects through which runs a subtle bond of kinship, would inevitably present a certain amount of overlapping and repetition, especially when, as in this case, they are arranged to fit in with a definite scheme and purpose. It is needless to apologize for the exclusion from this selection of such overlapping periods and passages, though a few had unavoidably to remain. Again, it is not difficult to understand how easy it is for a public speaker to disengage himself temporarily from his subject, and to be drawn

into digressions many of which may have only a distant bearing on the matter in hand. Such digressions, if they proceed from the rhythmic and modulated delivery of a Tagore, may have their charm when listened to, but when presented in cold print, lose, like the manna which fed the children of Israel in the wilderness, their savour and power of nutriment on the morrow ; we therefore felt no remorse in deciding upon their omission.

A friend who has seen this selection has written to say that he felt like understanding Dr. Tagore much better after going through the manuscript than after reading volumes on the poet ; if we could be sure that this opinion was not merely a concession to what he considered the demands of courtesy, we should feel highly gratified at having achieved a result which had been our aim and on which we had set our heart.

It remains to record our deep indebtedness to Dr. Tagore for consenting to our making a selection of his lectures and addresses, and for signifying his approval of our choice.

ANTHONY X. SOARES.

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## MY LIFE <sup>1</sup>

I WAS born in 1861 : that is not an important date of history, but it belongs to a great period of our history in Bengal. You do not know perhaps that we have our places of pilgrimage in those spots where the rivers meet in confluence, the rivers which to us are the symbols of the spirit of life in nature, and which in their meeting present emblems of the meeting of spirits, the meeting of ideals. Just about the time I was born the currents of three movements had met in the life of our country.

One of these movements was religious, introduced by a very great-hearted man of gigantic intelligence, Raja Rammohan Roy.<sup>2</sup> It was revolutionary, for he tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance.

<sup>1</sup> *A lecture delivered in China in 1924.*

<sup>2</sup> Indian religious reformer (*b.* 1774, *d.* 1833); founder of the Brahma Samaj or Theistic Church 'for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable, Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe.' He was the enemy of idol worship, supported the abolition of Sati, and worked hard to spread education among his countrymen. He visited England and France in 1832; died on the 27th of September, 1833, at Bristol.

There was a great fight between him and the orthodox who suspected every living idea that was dynamic. People who cling to an ancient past have their pride in the antiquity of their accumulations, in the sublimity of time-honoured walls around them. They grow nervous and angry when some great spirit, some lover of truth, breaks open their enclosure and floods it with the sunshine of thought and the breath of life. Ideas cause movement, and all movements forward they consider to be a menace against their warehouse security.

This was happening about the time I was born. I am proud to say that my father was one of the great leaders of that movement, a movement for whose sake he suffered ostracism and braved social indignities. I was born in this atmosphere of the advent of new ideals, which at the same time were old, older than all the things of which that age was proud.

There was a second movement equally important. A certain great man, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee,<sup>1</sup> who, though much older than myself, was my contemporary and lived long enough for me to see him, was the first pioneer in the literary revolution which happened in Bengal about that time.

Our self-expression must find its freedom not only in spiritual ideas but in literary manifestations. But

<sup>1</sup> Bengali novelist (b. 1838, d. 1894); the first in Bengal to take the B.A. degree (1858); entered the Indian Civil Service, from which he retired in 1894. He was the greatest Indian novelist during the nineteenth century, and his work was modelled on Scott's historical novels. His influence even at present is very considerable; among the literary young men he gathered round him was Rabindranath Tagore. He is the author of the Indian national anthem, *Vande Mataram*.

our literature had allowed its creative life to vanish. It lacked movement, and was fettered by a rhetoric rigid as death. This man was brave enough to go against the orthodoxy which believed in the security of tombstones and in that perfection which can only belong to the lifeless. He lifted the dead weight of ponderous forms from our language and with a touch of his magic wand aroused our literature from her age-long sleep. What a vision of beauty she revealed to us when she awoke in the fulness of her strength and grace.

There was yet another movement started about this time in my country which was called National. It was not fully political, but it began to give voice to the mind of our people trying to assert their own personality. It was a voice of indignation at the humiliation constantly heaped upon us by people who were not oriental, and who had, especially at that time, the habit of sharply dividing the human world into the good and the bad according to what was similar to their life and what was different.

This contemptuous spirit of separateness was perpetually hurting us and causing great damage to our own world of culture. It generated in the young men of our country distrust of all things that had come to them as an inheritance from their past. The old Indian pictures and other works of art were laughed at by our students in imitation of the laughter of their European schoolmasters. The same spirit of rejection, born of utter ignorance, was cultivated in other departments of our culture. It was the result of the hypnotism exercised upon the

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minds of the younger generation by people who were loud of voice and strong of arm.

The spirit of revolt had just awakened when I was born, and some people were already trying to stem the tide. This movement had its leaders in my own family, in my brothers and cousins, and they stood up to save the people's mind from being insulted and ignored by the people themselves.

We have to find some basis that is universal, that is eternal, and we have to discover those things which have an everlasting value. The national movement was started to proclaim that we must not be indiscriminate in our rejection of the past. This was not a reactionary movement but a revolutionary one, because it set out with a great courage to deny and to oppose all pride in mere borrowings.

These three movements were on foot, and in all three the members of my own family took active part. We were ostracized because of our heterodox opinions about religion and, therefore, we enjoyed the freedom of the outcaste. We had to build our own world with our own thoughts and energy of mind. We had to build it from the foundation, and therefore had to seek the foundation that was firm.

As I say, I was born and brought up in an atmosphere of the confluence of three movements, all of which were revolutionary. I was born in a family which had to live its own life, which led me from my young days to seek guidance for my own self-expression in my own inner standard of judgment. The medium of expression doubtless was my mother tongue. But the language which belonged to the



people had to be modulated according to the urging which I as an individual had.

No poet should borrow his medium ready-made from some shop of respectability. He should not only have his own seeds but prepare his own soil. Each poet has his own distinct medium of language—not because the whole language is of his own make, but because his individual use of it, having life's magic touch, transforms it into a special vehicle of his own creation.

The races of man have poetry in their heart, and it is necessary for them to give, as far as is possible, a perfect expression to their sentiments. For this they must have a medium, moving and pliant, which can freshly become their very own, age after age. All great languages have undergone and are still undergoing changes. Those languages which resist the spirit of change are doomed and will never produce great harvests of thought and literature. When forms become fixed, the spirit either weakly accepts its imprisonment within them or rebels. All revolutions consist of the fight of the within against invasion by the without.

Revolution must come, and men must risk revilement and misunderstanding, especially from those who want to be comfortable, who put their faith in materialism and convention, and who belong truly to the dead past and not to modern times—the past that had its age in distant antiquity, when physical flesh and size predominated, and not the mind of man.

Purely physical dominance is mechanical, and

modern machines are merely exaggerating our bodies, lengthening and multiplying our limbs. The modern child delights in this enormous bodily bulk, representing an inordinate material power, saying, 'Let me have the big toy and no sentiment which can disturb it.' He does not realize that we are returning to that antediluvian age which revelled in its production of gigantic physical frames, leaving no room for the freedom of the inner spirit.

All great human movements in the world are related to some great ideal. Some of you say that such a doctrine of spirit has been in its death-throes for over a century and is now moribund, that we have nothing to rely upon but external forces and material foundations. But I say, on my part, that your doctrine was obsolete long ago. It was exploded in the springtime of life, when mere size was swept off the face of the world, and was replaced by man, brought naked into the heart of creation, man with his helpless body, but with his indomitable mind and spirit.

The impertinence of material things is extremely old. The revelation of spirit in man is truly modern : I am on its side, for I am modern.

When I began my life as a poet, the writers among our educated community took their inspiration from English literature. I suppose it was fortunate for me that I never in my life had what is called an education—that is to say, the kind of school and college training which is considered proper for a boy of respectable family. Though I cannot say

I was altogether free from the influence that ruled the young minds of those days, the course of my writings was nevertheless saved from the groove of imitative forms. I believe it was chiefly because I had the good fortune to escape the school training which could set up for me an artificial standard based upon the prescription of the schoolmaster. In my versification, vocabulary and ideas I yielded myself to the vagaries of an untutored fancy which brought castigation upon me from critics who were learned, and uproarious laughter from the witty. My ignorance combined with my heresy turned me into a literary outlaw.

When I began my career I was ridiculously young ; in fact, I was the youngest of the writers of that time who had made themselves articulate. I had neither the protective armour of mature age nor that of a respectable English education. So in my seclusion of contempt and qualified encouragement I had my freedom. Gradually I grew up in years—for which, however, I claim no credit. Gradually I cut my way through derision and occasional patronage into a recognition in which the proportion of praise and blame was very much like that of land and water on our earth.

If you ask me what gave me boldness, when I was young, I should say that one thing was my early acquaintance with the old Vaishnava <sup>1</sup> poems

<sup>1</sup> Vaishnavism is the name given to the Hindu sect the members of which in a special way worship Vishnu, the second god of the Hindu Triad. The erotic tendency of some Vaishnava poetry, especially in connection with the cult of Radha and Krishna, has aroused opposition among the more sober-minded Hindus.

of Bengal, full of the freedom of metre and courage of expression. I think I was only twelve when these poems first began to be reprinted. I surreptitiously got hold of copies from the desks of my elders. For the edification of the young, I must confess that this was not right for a boy of my age. I should have been passing my examinations and not following a path that would lead to failure. I must also admit that the greater part of these lyrics was erotic and not quite suited to a boy just about to reach his teens. But my imagination was fully occupied with the beauty of their forms and the music of their words ; and their breath, heavily laden with voluptuousness, passed over my mind without distracting it.

My vagabondage in the path of my literary career had another reason. My father was the leader of a new religious movement, a strict monotheism based upon the teachings of the Upanishads.<sup>1</sup> My countrymen in Bengal thought him almost as bad as a Christian, if not worse. So we were completely ostracized, which probably saved me from another disaster, that of imitating our own past.

Most of the members of my family had some gift—some were artists, some poets, some musicians—and the whole atmosphere of our home was permeated with the spirit of creation. I had a deep sense, almost from infancy, of the beauty of nature, an intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and the clouds, and felt in tune with the

<sup>1</sup> These are a number of Sanskrit treatises or dialogues containing the philosophical speculations of Indian sages ; they date from about 1000 B.C.

musical touch of the seasons in the air. At the same time I had a peculiar susceptibility to human kindness. All these craved expression, and naturally I wanted to give them my own expression. The very earnestness of my emotions yearned to be true to themselves though I was too immature to give their expression any perfection of form.

Since then I have gained a reputation in my country, but a strong current of antagonism in a large section of my countrymen still persists. Some say that my poems do not spring from the heart of the national traditions ; some complain that they are incomprehensible, others that they are unwholesome. In fact, I have never had complete acceptance from my own people, and that too has been a blessing ; for nothing is so demoralizing as unqualified success.

This is the history of my career. I wish I could reveal it more clearly through the narration of my own work in my own language. I hope that will be possible some day or other. Languages are jealous. They do not give up their best treasures to those who try to deal with them through an intermediary belonging to an alien rival. You have to court them in person and dance attendance on them. Poems are not like gold or other substantial things that are transferable. You cannot receive the smiles and glances of your sweetheart through an attorney, however diligent and dutiful he may be.

I myself have tried to get at the wealth of beauty in the literature of the European languages. When I was young I tried to approach Dante, unfortu-

nately through a translation. I failed utterly, and felt it my pious duty to desist. Dante remained a closed book to me.

I also wanted to know German literature, and, by reading Heine in translation, I thought I had caught a glimpse of the beauty there. Fortunately I met a missionary lady from Germany and asked her help. I worked hard for some months, but being rather quick-witted, which is not a good quality, I was not persevering. I had the dangerous facility which helps one to guess the meaning too easily. My teacher thought I had almost mastered the language—which was not true. I succeeded, however, in getting through Heine, like a man walking in sleep crossing unknown paths with ease, and I found immense pleasure.

Then I tried Goethe. But that was too ambitious. With the help of the little German I had learnt, I did go through *Faust*. I believe I found my entrance to the palace, not like one who has keys for all the doors, but as a casual visitor who is tolerated in some general guest room, comfortable but not intimate. Properly speaking, I do not know my Goethe ; and in the same way many other great luminaries are dark to me.

This is as it should be. Man cannot reach the shrine if he does not make the pilgrimage. I hope that this may make you want to learn Bengali some day.

In regard to music, I claim to be something of a musician myself. I have composed many songs which have defied the canons of respectable ortho-

doxy, and good people are disgusted at the impudence of a man who is audacious only because he is untrained. But I persist, and God forgives me because I do not know what I do. Possibly that is the best way of doing things in the sphere of art ; for I find that people blame me, but also sing my songs, even if not always correctly.

Please do not think I am vain. I can judge myself objectively and can openly express admiration for my own work, because I am modest. I do not hesitate to say that my songs have found their place in the heart of my land, along with her flowers that are never exhausted, and that the folk of the future, in days of joy or sorrow or festival, will have to sing them. This too is the work of a revolutionist.

I have been asked to let you know something about my own view of religion. One of the reasons why I always feel reluctant to speak about this is that I have not come to my own religion through the portals of passive acceptance of a particular creed owing to some accident of birth. I was born to a family who were pioneers in the revival in our country of a great religion, based upon the utterance of Indian sages in the Upanishads. But, owing to my idiosyncrasy of temperament, it was impossible for me to accept any religious teaching on the only ground that people in my surroundings believed it to be true. I could not persuade myself to imagine that I had a religion simply because everybody whom I might trust believed in its value.

Thus my mind was brought up in an atmosphere of freedom, freedom from the dominance of

any creed that had its sanction in the definite authority of some scripture or in the teaching of some organized body of worshippers. And, therefore, when I am questioned about religion, I have no prepared ground on which to take my stand, no training in a systematic approach to the subject.

My religion essentially is a poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other, and though their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept secret from me. Then suddenly came a day when their union was revealed to me.

At that time I was living in a village. The day came with all its drifting trivialities of the usual commonplace. The ordinary work of my morning had come to its close, and before going to take my bath I stood for a moment at my window, overlooking a market-place on the bank of a dry river bed. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted, and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. The feeling which I had was like what a man, groping through a fog without knowing his destination, might feel when he suddenly discovers that he stands before his own house.

I remember the day in my childhood when, after the painful process of learning my Bengali alphabet, I unexpectedly came to the first simple combination



of letters which gave me the words : ' it rains, the leaves tremble.' I was thrilled with the delight of the picture which these words suggested to me. The unmeaning fragments lost their individual isolation and my mind revelled in the unity of a vision. In a similar manner, on that morning in the village, the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth. All things that had seemed like vagrant waves were revealed to my mind in relation to a boundless sea. From that time I have been able to maintain the faith that, in all my experience of nature or man, there is the fundamental truth of spiritual reality.

You will understand me if I tell you how unconsciously I had been travelling towards the realization which I stumbled upon that day. I hope you will excuse me and not think that I am boasting when I confess to my gift of poesy, an instrument of expression delicately responsive to the breath that comes from depth of feeling. From my infancy I had the keen sensitiveness which always kept my mind tingling with consciousness of the world around me, natural and human.

We had a small garden attached to our house ; it was a fairyland to me, where miracles of beauty were of everyday occurrence. Almost every morning in the early hour of the dusk, I would run out from my bed in a hurry to greet the first pink flush of the dawn through the trembling leaves of the cocoanut trees which stood in a line along the garden boundary, while the grass glistened as the dewdrops caught the first tremor of the morning

breeze. The sky seemed to bring to me the call of a personal companionship, and all my heart, my whole body in fact, used to drink in at a draught the overflowing light and peace of those silent hours. I was anxious never to miss a single morning, because each one was precious to me, more precious than gold to the miser.

I had been blessed with that sense of wonder which gives a child his right of entry into the treasure-house of mystery which is in the heart of existence. I neglected my studies because they rudely summoned me away from the world around me, which was my friend and my companion, and when I was thirteen I freed myself from the clutch of an educational system that tried to keep me imprisoned within the stone walls of lessons.

This perhaps will explain to you the meaning of my religion. This world was living to me, intimately close to my life. I still remember the shock of repulsion I received when some medical student brought to me a piece of human windpipe and tried to excite my admiration for its structure. He tried to convince me that it was the source of the beautiful human voice, and I rejected that information with an intense disgust. I did not want to admire the skill of the workman, but rather to revel in the joy of the artist who concealed the machinery and revealed his creation in its ineffable unity.

God does not care to keep exposed the record of His power written in geological inscriptions, but He is proudly glad of the expression of beauty which He spreads on the green grass, in the flowers,

in the play of colours on the clouds, in the murmuring music of running water.

It was a great thing for me that my consciousness was never dull about the facts of the surrounding world. That the cloud was the cloud, that a flower was a flower, was enough, because they directly spoke to me, because I could not be indifferent to them. I still remember the very moment, one afternoon, when coming back from school I alighted from the carriage and suddenly saw in the sky, behind the upper terrace of our house, an exuberance of deep dark rain-clouds lavishing rich cool shadows on the atmosphere. The marvel of it, the very generosity of its presence, gave me a joy which was freedom, the freedom we feel in the love of our dear friend.

That which merely gives us information can be explained in terms of measurement, but that which gives us joy cannot be explained by the facts of a mere grouping of atoms and molecules. Somewhere in the arrangement of this world there seems to be a great concern about giving us delight, which shows that, in the universe, over and above the meaning of matter and force, there is a message conveyed through the magic touch of personality. This touch cannot be analysed, it can only be felt.

Is it merely because the rose is round and pink that it gives me more satisfaction than the gold which could buy me the necessities of life, or any number of slaves? You may, at the outset, deny the truth that a rose gives more delight than a piece of gold. But you must remember that I am not

speaking of artificial values. If we had to cross a desert whose sand was made of gold, then the cruel glitter of these dead particles would become a terror for us, and the sight of a rose would bring to us the music of paradise.

The final meaning of the delight which we find in a rose can never be in the roundness of its petals, just as the final meaning of the joy of music cannot be in a gramophone disk. Somehow we feel that through a rose the language of love reaches our heart. Do we not carry a rose to our beloved because in it is already embodied a message which unlike our language of words cannot be analysed? Through this gift of a rose we utilize a universal language of joy for our own purposes of expression.

Mere information of facts, mere discovery of power, belongs to the outside and not to the inner soul of things. Gladness is the one criterion of truth, and we know when we have touched Truth by the music it gives, by the joy of the greeting it sends forth to the truth in us. As I have said before, it is not as ether waves that we receive our light: the morning does not wait for some scientist for its introduction to us. In the same way, we touch the infinite reality immediately within us only when we receive the pure truth of love or goodness, not through the explanation of theologians, not through the erudite discussion of ethical doctrines.

I have already confessed to you that my religion is a poet's religion; all that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge. I frankly say that I cannot satisfactorily answer your questions about

evil, or about what happens after death. And yet I am sure that there have come moments when my soul has touched the infinite and has become intensely conscious of it through the illumination of joy. It has been said in our Upanishads that our mind and our words come away baffled from the supreme Truth, but he who knows *That*, through the immediate joy of his own soul, is saved from all doubts and fears.

In the night we stumble over things and become acutely conscious of their individual separateness, but the day reveals the great unity which embraces them. And the man, whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness, at once realizes the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences of race, and his mind no longer awkwardly stumbles over individual facts of separateness in the human world, accepting them as final ; he realizes that peace is in the inner harmony which dwells in truth, and not in any outer adjustments ; that beauty carries an eternal assurance of our spiritual relationship to reality, which waits for its perfection in the response of our love.

## MY SCHOOL<sup>1</sup>

I STARTED a school in Bengal when I was nearing forty. Certainly this was never expected of me, who had spent the greater portion of my life in writing, chiefly verses. Therefore people naturally thought that as a school it might not be one of the best of its kind, but it was sure to be something outrageously new, being the product of daring inexperience.

This is one of the reasons why I am often asked what is the idea upon which my school is based. The question is a very embarrassing one for me, because to satisfy the expectation of my questioners I cannot afford to be commonplace in my answer. However, I shall resist the temptation to be original and shall be content with being merely truthful.

In the first place, I must confess it is difficult for me to say what is the idea which underlies my institution. For the idea is not like a fixed foundation upon which a building is erected. It is more like a seed which cannot be separated and pointed out directly it begins to grow into a plant.

And I know what it was to which this school owes its origin. It was not any new theory of education, but the memory of my school-days.

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in America, published in 'Personality'.

That those days were unhappy ones for me I cannot altogether ascribe to my peculiar temperament or to any special demerit of the schools to which I was sent. It may be that if I had been a little less sensitive, I could gradually have accommodated myself to the pressure and survived long enough to earn my university degrees. But all the same, schools are schools, though some are better and some worse, according to their own standard.

The provision has been made for infants to be fed upon their mother's milk. They find their food and their mother at the same time. It is complete nourishment for them, body and soul. It is their first introduction to the great truth that man's true relationship with the world is that of personal love and not that of the mechanical law of causation.

Therefore our childhood should be given its full measure of life's draught, for which it has an endless thirst. The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. And this is what our regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It forcibly snatches away children from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiwork, full of the suggestiveness of personality. It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results. It follows an imaginary straight line of the average in digging its channel of education. But life's line is not the straight line, for it is fond of playing the see-saw

with the line of the average, bringing upon its head the rebuke of the school. For according to the school, life is perfect when it allows itself to be treated as dead, to be cut into symmetrical conveniences. And this was the cause of my suffering when I was sent to school. For all of a sudden I found my world vanishing from around me, giving place to wooden benches and straight walls staring at me with the blank stare of the blind.

The legend is that eating of the fruit of knowledge is not consonant with dwelling in paradise. Therefore men's children have to be banished from their paradise into a realm of death, dominated by the decency of a tailoring department. So my mind had to accept the tight-fitting encasement of the school which, being like the shoes of a mandarin woman, pinched and bruised my nature on all sides and at every movement. I was fortunate enough in extricating myself before insensibility set in.

Though I did not have to serve the full penal term which men of my position have to undergo to find their entrance into cultured society, I am glad that I did not altogether escape from its molestation. For it has given me knowledge of the wrong from which the children of men suffer.

The cause of it is this, that man's intention is going against God's intention as to how children should grow into knowledge. How we should conduct our business is our own affair, and therefore in our offices we are free to create in the measure of our special purposes. But such office arrangement



does not suit God's creation. And children are God's own creation.

We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fulness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature, and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world, but is banished into the world of living gramophones, to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment.

We all know children are lovers of the dust ; their whole body and mind thirst for sunlight and air as flowers do. They are never in a mood to refuse the constant invitations to establish direct communication which come to their senses from the universe.

But unfortunately for children their parents, in the pursuit of their profession, in conformity to their social traditions, live in their own peculiar world of habits. Much of this cannot be helped. For men have to specialize, driven by circumstances and by need of social uniformity.

But our childhood is the period when we have or ought to have more freedom—freedom from the necessity of specialization into the narrow bounds of social and professional conventionalism.

I well remember the surprise and annoyance of an experienced headmaster, reputed to be a successful disciplinarian, when he saw one of the boys of my school climbing a tree and choosing a fork of the branches for settling down to his studies. I had to say to him in explanation that 'childhood is the only period of life when a civilized man can exercise his choice between the branches of a tree and his drawing-room chair, and should I deprive this boy of that privilege because I, as a grown-up man, am barred from it?' What is surprising is to notice the same headmaster's approbation of the boys' studying botany. He believes in an impersonal knowledge of the tree because that is science, but not in a personal experience of it. This growth of experience leads to forming instinct, which is the result of nature's own method of instruction. The boys of my school have acquired instinctive knowledge of the physiognomy of the tree. By the least touch they know where they can find a foothold upon an apparently inhospitable trunk; they know how far they can take liberty

with the branches, how to distribute their bodies' weight so as to make themselves least burdensome to branchlets. My boys are able to make the best possible use of the tree in the matter of gathering fruits, taking rest and hiding from undesirable pursuers. I myself was brought up in a cultured home in a town, and as far as my personal behaviour goes, I have been obliged to act all through my life as if I were born in a world where there are no trees. Therefore I consider it as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living trees.

Naturally the soles of our feet are so made that they become the best instruments for us to stand upon the earth and to walk with. From the day we commenced to wear shoes we minimized the purpose of our feet. With the lessening of their responsibility they have lost their dignity, and now they lend themselves to be pampered with socks, slippers and shoes of all prices and shapes and misproportions. For us it amounts to a grievance against God for not giving us hooves instead of beautifully sensitive soles.

I am not for banishing footgear altogether from men's use. But I have no hesitation in asserting that the soles of children's feet should not be deprived of their education, provided for them by nature, free of cost. Of all the limbs we have they are the best adapted for intimately knowing

the earth by their touch. For the earth has her subtle modulations of contour which she only offers for the kiss of her true lovers—the feet.

I have again to confess that I was brought up in a respectable household, and my feet from childhood have been carefully saved from all naked contact with the dust. When I try to emulate my boys in walking barefoot, I painfully realize what thickness of ignorance about the earth I carry under my feet. I invariably choose the thorns to tread upon in such a manner as to make the thorns exult. My feet have not the instinct to follow the lines of least resistance. For even the flattest of earth-surfaces has its dimples of diminutive hills and dales only discernible by educated feet. I have often wondered at the unreasonable zigzag of footpaths across perfectly plain fields. It becomes all the more perplexing when you consider that a footpath is not made by the caprice of one individual. Unless most of the walkers possessed exactly the same eccentricity such obviously inconvenient passages could not have been made. But the real cause lies in the subtle suggestions coming from the earth to which our feet unconsciously respond. Those for whom such communications have not been cut off can adjust the muscles of their feet with great rapidity at the least indication. Therefore, they can save themselves from the intrusion of thorns, even while treading upon them, and walk barefooted on a gravelly path without the least discomfort. I know that in the practical world shoes will be worn, roads will be metalled, cars will be used.

But during their period of education, should children not be given to know that the world is not all drawing-room, that there is such a thing as nature to which their limbs are made beautifully to respond ?

There are men who think that by the simplicity of living, introduced in my school, I preach the idealization of poverty which prevailed in the mediaeval age. From the point of view of education, should we not admit that poverty is the school in which man had his first lessons and his best training ? Even a millionaire's son has to be born helplessly poor and to begin his lesson of life from the beginning. He has to learn to walk like the poorest of children, though he has means to afford to be without the appendage of legs. Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living richly is living mostly by proxy, and thus living in a world of lesser reality. This may be good for one's pleasure and pride, but not for one's education. Wealth is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening of their powers. Therefore in my school, much to the disgust of the people of expensive habits, I had to provide for this great teacher—this bareness of furniture and materials—not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world.

What tortured me in my school-days was the fact that the school had not the completeness of the world. It was a special arrangement for giving lessons. It could only be suitable for grown-up

people who were conscious of the special need of such places and therefore ready to accept their teaching at the cost of dissociation from life. But children are in love with life, and it is their first love. All its colour and movement attract their eager attention. And are we quite sure of our wisdom in stifling this love? Children are not born ascetics, fit to enter at once into the monastic discipline of acquiring knowledge. At first they must gather knowledge through their love of life, and then they will renounce their lives to gain knowledge, and then again they will come back to their fuller lives with ripened wisdom.

But society has made its own arrangements for manipulating men's minds to fit its special patterns. These arrangements are so closely organized that it is difficult to find gaps through which to bring in nature. There is a serial adjustment of penalties which follows to the end one who ventures to take liberty with some part of the arrangements, even to save his soul. Therefore it is one thing to realize ~~truth~~ and another to bring it into practice where ~~the~~ whole current of the prevailing system goes against you. This is why, when I had to face the problem of my own son's education, I was at a loss to give it a practical solution. The first thing that I did was to take him away from the town surroundings into a village and allow him the freedom of primeval nature as far as it is available in modern days. He had a river, noted for its danger, where he swam and rowed without check from the anxiety of his elders. He spent his time

in the fields and on the trackless sand-banks, coming late for his meals without being questioned. He had none of those luxuries that are not only customary but are held as proper for boys of his circumstance. For which privations, I am sure, he was pitied and his parents blamed by the people for whom society has blotted out the whole world. But I was certain that luxuries are burdens to boys. They are the burdens of other people's habits, the burdens of the vicarious pride and pleasure which parents enjoy through their children.

Yet, being an individual of limited resources, I could do very little for my son in the way of educating him according to my plan. But he had freedom of movement : he had very few of the screens of wealth and respectability between himself and the world of nature. Thus he had a better opportunity for a real experience of this universe than I ever had. But one thing exercised my mind as more important than anything else.

The object of education is to give man the unity of truth. Formerly, when life was simple, all the different elements of man were in complete harmony. But when there came the separation of the intellect from the spiritual and the physical, the school education put entire emphasis on the intellect and the physical side of man. We devote our sole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis we are accentuating a break between the intellectual, physical and the spiritual life.

I believe in a spiritual world, not as anything separate from this world, but as its innermost

truth. With the breath we draw, we must always feel this truth, that we are living in God. Born in this great world, full of the mystery of the infinite, we cannot accept our existence as a momentary outburst of chance, drifting on the current of matter towards an eternal nowhere. We cannot look upon our lives as dreams of a dreamer who has no awakening in all time. We have a personality to which matter and force are unmeaning unless related to something infinitely personal, whose nature we have discovered, in some measure, in human love, in the greatness of the good, in the martyrdom of heroic souls, in the ineffable beauty of nature, which can never be a mere physical fact nor anything but an expression of personality.

Experience of this spiritual world, whose reality we miss by our incessant habit of ignoring it from childhood, has to be gained by children by fully living in it and not through the medium of theological instruction. But how this is to be done is a problem difficult of solution in the present age. For nowadays men have managed so fully to occupy their time that they do not find leisure to know that their activities have only movement but very little truth, that their soul has not found its world.

In India we still cherish in our memory the tradition of the forest colonies of great teachers. These places were neither schools nor monasteries in the modern sense of the word. They consisted of homes where with their families lived men whose object was to see the world in God and to realize their own life in Him. Though they lived outside



society, yet they were to society what the sun is to the planets, the centre from which it received its life and light. And here boys grew up in an intimate vision of eternal life before they were thought fit to enter the state of the householder.

Thus in the ancient India the school was there where was the life itself. There the students were brought up, not in the academic atmosphere of scholarship and learning, or in the maimed life of monastic seclusion, but in the atmosphere of living aspiration. They took the cattle to pasture, collected firewood, gathered fruit, cultivated kindness to all creatures, and grew in their spirit with their own teacher's spiritual growth. This was possible because the primary object of these places was not teaching but giving shelter to those who lived their life in God.

That this traditional relationship of the masters and disciples is not a mere romantic fiction is proved by the relic we still possess of the indigenous system of education. These *chatuspathis*, which is the Sanskrit name for the university, have not the savour of the school about them. The students live in their master's home like the children of the house, without having to pay for their board and lodging or tuition. The teacher prosecutes his own study, living a life of simplicity, and helping the students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession. This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind. Those who in other countries are favoured with unlimited

expectations of worldly prospects can fix their purposes of education on those objects. But for us to maintain the self-respect which we owe to ourselves and to our creator, we must make the purpose of our education nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and freedom of soul. It is pitiful to have to scramble for small pittances of fortune. Only let us have access to the life that goes beyond death and rises above all circumstances, let us find our God, let us live for that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love. Such emancipation of soul we have witnessed in our country among men devoid of book-learning and living in absolute poverty. In India we have the inheritance of this treasure of spiritual wisdom. Let the object of our education be to open it out before us and to give us the power to make the true use of it in our life, and offer it to the rest of the world when the time comes, as our contribution to its eternal welfare.

I had been immersed in literary activities when this thought struck my mind with painful intensity. I suddenly felt like one groaning under the suffocation of nightmare. It was not only my own soul, but the soul of my country that seemed to be struggling for its breath through me. I felt clearly that what was needed was not any particular material object, not wealth or comfort or power, but our awakening to full consciousness in soul freedom, the freedom of the life in God, where we have no

enmity with those who must fight, no competition with those who must make money, where we are beyond all attacks and above all insults.

Fortunately for me I had a place ready to my hand where I could begin my work. My father, in one of his numerous travels, had selected this lonely spot as the one suitable for his life of communion with God. This place, with a permanent endowment, he dedicated to the use of those who seek peace and seclusion for their meditation and prayer. I had about ten boys with me when I came here and started my new life with no previous experience whatever.

All around our *āshram*<sup>1</sup> is a vast open country, bare up to the line of the horizon except for sparsely-growing stunted date-palms and prickly shrubs struggling with ant-hills. Below the level of the field there extend numberless mounds and tiny hillocks of red gravel and pebbles of all shapes and colours, intersected by narrow channels of rain-water. Not far away towards the south, near the village, can be seen through the intervals of a row of palm trees the gleaming surface of steel-blue water, collected in a hollow of the ground. A road used by the village people for their marketing in the town goes meandering through the lonely fields, with its red dust staring in the sun. Travellers coming up this road can see from a distance on the summit of the undulating ground the spire of a temple and the top of a building, indicating the

<sup>1</sup>Originally a forest hermitage, now used of any welfare institution run by a social reformer or public worker.

Shanti-Niketan<sup>1</sup> *āshram*, among its *āmālaki*<sup>2</sup> groves and its avenue of stately *sāl*<sup>3</sup> trees.

And here the school has been growing up for over fifteen years, passing through many changes and often grave crisis. Having the evil reputation of a poet, I could with great difficulty win the trust of my countrymen and avoid the suspicion of the bureaucracy. My resources were extremely small, with the burden of a heavy debt upon them. But this poverty itself gave me the full strength of freedom, making me rely upon truth rather than upon materials.

But the question will be asked whether I have attained my ideal in this institution. My answer is that the attainment of all our deepest ideals is difficult to measure by outward standards. Its working is not immediately perceptible by results. We have fully admitted the inequalities and varieties of human life in our *āshram*. We never try to gain some kind of outward uniformity by weeding out the differences of nature and training of our members. Some of us belong to the Brahma Samaj sect and some to other sects of Hinduism ; and some of us are Christians. Because we do not deal with creeds and dogmas of sectarianism, therefore this heterogeneity of our religious beliefs does not present us with any difficulty whatever.

It will be difficult for others than Indians to realize all the associations that are grouped round the word *āshram*, the forest sanctuary. For it

<sup>1</sup> *Shanti* is peace and *Niketan* abode : abode of peace.

<sup>2</sup> The *Phyllanthus Emblica*.

<sup>3</sup> The *Shorea Robusta*.

blossomed in India like its own lotus, under a sky generous in its sunlight and starry splendour. India's climate has brought to us the invitation of the open air ; the language of her mighty rivers is solemn in their chants ; the limitless expanse of her plains encircles our homes with the silence of the world beyond ; there the sun rises from the marge of the green earth like an offering of the unseen to the altar of the Unknown, and it goes down to the west at the end of the day like a gorgeous ceremony of nature's salutation to the Eternal. In India the shades of the trees are hospitable, the dust of the earth stretches its brown arms to us, the air with its embraces clothes us with warmth. These are the unchanging facts that ever carry their suggestions to our minds, and therefore we feel it is India's mission to realize the truth of the human soul in the Supreme Soul through its union with the soul of the world. This mission had taken its natural form in the forest schools in the ancient time. And it still urges us to seek for the vision of the infinite in all forms of creation, in the human relationships of love ; to feel it in the air we breathe, in the light in which we open our eyes, in the water in which we bathe, in the earth on which we live and die. Therefore I know—and I know it from my own experience—that the students and the teachers who have come together in this *āshram* are daily growing towards the emancipation of their minds into the consciousness of the infinite, not through any process of teaching or outer discipline but by the help of an

unseen atmosphere of aspiration that surrounds the place and the memory of a devoted soul who lived here in intimate communion with God.

In the teaching system of my school I have been trying all these years to carry out my theory of education, based upon my experience of children's minds.

I believe, as I suggested before, that children have their subconscious mind more active than their conscious intelligence. A vast quantity of the most important of our lessons has been taught to us through this. Experiences of countless generations have been instilled into our nature by its agency, not only without causing us any fatigue, but giving us joy. This subconscious faculty of knowledge is completely one with our life. It is not like a lantern that can be lighted and trimmed from outside, but it is like the light that the glow-worm possesses by the exercise of its life-process.

Fortunately for me I was brought up in a family where literature, music and art had become instinctive. My brothers and cousins lived in the freedom of ideas, and most of them had natural artistic powers. Nourished in these surroundings, I began to think early and to dream and to put my thoughts into expression. In religion and social ideals our family was free from all convention, being ostracized by society owing to our secession from orthodox beliefs and customs. This made us fearless in our freedom of mind, and we tried experiments in all departments of life. This was the education I had in my early days, freedom and joy

in the exercise of my mental and artistic faculties. And because this made my mind fully alive to grow in its natural environment of nutrition, therefore the grinding of the school system became so extremely intolerable to me.

I had only this experience of my early life to help me when I started my school. I felt sure that what was most necessary was the breath of culture and no formal method of teaching. Fortunately for me, Satish Chandra Roy, a young student of great promise, who was getting ready for his B.A. degree, became attracted to my school and devoted his life to carry out my idea. He was barely nineteen, but he had a wonderful soul, living in a world of ideas, keenly responsive to all that was beautiful and great in the realm of nature and of human mind. He was a poet who would surely have taken his place among the immortals of world literature, if he had been spared to live, but he died when he was twenty, thus offering his service to our school only for the period of one short year. With him boys never felt that they were confined in the limit of a teaching class ; they seemed to have their access to everywhere. They would go with him to the forest when in the spring the *sāl* trees were in full blossom, and he would recite to them his favourite poems, frenzied with excitement. He used to read to them Shakespeare and even Browning—for he was a great lover of Browning—explaining to them in Bengali with his wonderful power of expression. He never had any feeling of distrust for boys' capacity of understanding ; he would talk and read

to them about whatever was the subject in which he himself was interested. He knew that it was not at all necessary for the boys to understand literally and accurately, but that their minds should be roused, and in this he was always successful. He was not like other teachers, a mere vehicle of text-books. He made his teaching personal; he himself was the source of it, and therefore it was made of life-stuff, easily assimilable by the living human nature. The real reason of his success was his intense interest in life, in ideas, in everything around him, in the boys who came in contact with him. He had his inspiration not through the medium of books, but through the direct communication of his sensitive mind with the world. The seasons had upon him the same effect as they had upon the plants. He seemed to feel in his blood the unseen messages of nature that are always travelling through space, floating in the air, shimmering in the sky, tingling in the roots of the grass under the earth. The literature that he studied had not the least smell of the library about it. He had the power to see ideas before him, as he could see his friends, with all the distinctness of form and subtlety of life.

Thus the boys of our school were fortunate enough to be able to receive their lessons from a living teacher and not from text-books. Have not our books, like most of our necessities, come between us and our world? We have got into the habit of covering the windows of our minds with their pages, and plasters of book phrases have stuck into



our mental skin, making it impervious to all direct touches of truth. A whole world of bookish truths have formed themselves into a strong citadel with rings of walls in which we have taken shelter, secured from the communication of God's creation. Of course, it would be foolish to underrate the advantages of the book. But at the same time we must admit that the book has its limitations and its dangers. At any rate during the early period of education children should come to their lesson of truths through natural processes—directly through persons and things.

Being convinced of this, I have set all my resources to create an atmosphere of ideas in the *ashram*. Songs are composed—not specially made to order for juvenile minds. They are songs that a poet writes for his own pleasure. In fact, most of my 'Gitānjali' songs were written here. These, when fresh in their first bloom, are sung to the boys, and they come in crowds to learn them. They sing them in their leisure hours, sitting in groups, under the open sky on moonlight nights, in the shadows of the impending rain in July. All my latter-day plays have been written here, and the boys have taken part in their performance. Lyrical dramas have been written for their season-festivals. They have ready access to the room where I read to the teachers any new things that I write in prose or in verse, whatever the subject may be. And this they utilize without the least pressure put upon them, feeling aggrieved when not invited. A few weeks before leaving India I read to them Browning's

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drama *Luria*, translating it into Bengali as I went on. It took me two evenings, but the second meeting was as full as the first one. Those who have witnessed these boys playing their parts in dramatic performances have been struck with their wonderful power as actors. It is because they are never directly trained in the histrionic art. They instinctively enter into the spirit of the plays in which they take part, though these plays are no mere schoolboy dramas. They require subtle understanding and sympathy. With all the anxiety and hypercritical sensitiveness of an author about the performance of his own play I have never been disappointed in my boys, and I have rarely allowed teachers to interfere with the boys' own representation of the characters. Very often they themselves write plays or improvise them, and we are invited to their performance. They hold meetings of their literary clubs, and they have at least three illustrated magazines conducted by three sections of the school, the most interesting of them being that of the infant section. A number of our boys have shown remarkable powers in drawing and painting, developed not through the orthodox method of copying models, but by following their own bent and by the help of occasional visits from some artists to inspire the boys with their own work.

When I first started my school my boys had no evident love for music. The consequence was that at the beginning I did not employ a music teacher and did not force the boys to take music lessons.

I merely created opportunities when those of us who had the gift could exercise their musical culture. It had the effect of unconsciously training the ears of the boys. And when gradually most of them showed a strong inclination and love for music I saw that they would be willing to subject themselves to formal teaching, and it was then that I secured a music teacher.

In our school the boys rise very early in the morning, sometimes before it is light. They attend to the drawing of water for their bath. They make up their beds. They do all those things that tend to cultivate the spirit of self-help.

I believe in the hour of meditation, and I set aside fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the evening for that purpose. I insist on this period of meditation, not, however, expecting the boys to be hypocrites and to make believe they are meditating. But I do insist that they remain quiet, that they exert the power of self-control, even though, instead of contemplating on God, they may be watching the squirrels running up the trees.

Any description of such a school is necessarily inadequate. For the most important element of it is the atmosphere, and the fact that it is not a school which is imposed upon the boys by autocratic authorities. I always try to impress upon their minds that it is their own world, upon which their life ought fully and freely to react. In the school administration they have their place, and in the matter of punishment we mostly rely upon their own court of justice.

In conclusion, I warn my hearers not to carry away with them any false or exaggerated picture of this *āshram*. When ideas are stated in a paper, they appear too simple and complete. But in reality their manifestation through the materials that are living and varied and ever changing is not so clear and perfect. We have obstacles in human nature and in outer circumstances. Some of us have a feeble faith in boys' minds as living organisms, and some have the natural propensity of doing good by force. On the other hand, the boys have their different degrees of receptivity, and there are a good number of inevitable failures. Delinquencies make their appearance unexpectedly, making us suspicious as to the efficacy of our own ideals. We pass through dark periods of doubt and reaction. But these conflicts and waverings belong to the true aspects of reality. Living ideals can never be set into a clockwork arrangement, giving accurate account of its every second. And those who have firm faith in their idea have to test its truth in discords and failures that are sure to come to tempt them from their path. I for my part believe in the principle of life, in the soul of man, more than in methods. I believe that the object of education is the freedom of mind which can only be achieved through the path of freedom—though freedom has its risk and responsibility as life itself has. I know it for certain, though most people seem to have forgotten it, that children are living beings—more living than grown-up people, who have built their shells of habit around them. Therefore it is

absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love. It must be an *āshram* where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature ; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities ; where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept ; where they are bidden to realize man's world as God's Kingdom, to whose citizenship they have to aspire ; where the sunrise and sunset and the silent glory of stars are not daily ignored ; where nature's festivities of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man ; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to partake of their daily food and the food of their eternal life.

## CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS<sup>1</sup>

A CHINESE author writes : ' The terribly tragic aspect of the situation in China is that, while the Chinese nation is called upon to throw away its own civilization and adopt the civilization of modern Europe, there is not one single educated man in the whole Empire who has the remotest idea of what this modern European civilization really is.'

I have read elsewhere an observation made by a Frenchman, quoted in a magazine, in which he says that China is not a country but a civilization. Not having read the full discussion, I cannot be certain what he means. But it seems to me that, according to the writer, China represents an ideal and not the production and collection of certain things, or of information of a particular character about the nature of things ; that is to say, it stands for not merely progress in wealth and knowledge and power but a philosophy of life and the art of living.

The word ' civilization ' being a European word, we have hardly yet taken the trouble to find out its real meaning. For over a century we have accepted it, as we may accept a gift horse, with perfect trust,

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in China in 1924.

never caring to count its teeth. Only very lately we have begun to wonder if we realize in its truth what the Western people mean when they speak of civilization. We ask ourselves, 'Has it the same meaning as some word in our own language which denotes for us the idea of human perfection?'

Civilization cannot merely be a growing totality of happenings that by chance have assumed a particular shape and tendency which we consider to be excellent. (It must be the expression of some guiding moral force which we have evolved in our society for the object of attaining perfection.) The word 'perfection' has a simple and definite meaning when applied to an inanimate thing, or even to a creature whose life has principally a biological significance. But man being complex and always on the path of transcending himself, the meaning of the word 'perfection,' as applied to him, cannot be crystallized into an inflexible idea. This has made it possible for different races to have different shades of definition for this term.

The Sanskrit word *dharma* is the nearest synonym in our own language that occurs to me for the word civilization. In fact, we have no other word except perhaps some newly-coined one, lifeless and devoid of atmosphere. (The specific meaning of *dharma* is that principle which holds us firm together and leads us to our best welfare.) The general meaning of this word is the essential quality of a thing.

*Dharma* for man is the best expression of what he is in truth. He may reject *dharma* and may choose to be an animal or a machine and thereby may not

injure himself, may even gain strength and wealth from an external and material point of view ; yet this will be worse than death for him as a man. It has been said in our scriptures : *Through a-dharma (the negation of dharma) man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root.*

One who is merely a comfortable money-making machine does not carry in himself the perfect manifestations of man. He is like a gaudily embroidered purse which is empty. He raises a rich altar in his life to the blind and deaf image of a yawning negation and all the costly sacrifices continually offered to it are poured into the mouth of an ever hungry abyss. And according to our scriptures, even while he swells and shouts and violently gesticulates, he perishes.

The same idea has been expressed by the great Chinese sage, Lao-tze,<sup>1</sup> in a different manner, where he says : *One who may die, but will not perish, has life everlasting.* In this he also suggests that when a man reveals his truth he lives, and that truth itself is *dharma*. Civilization, according to this ideal, should be the expression of man's *dharma* in his corporate life.

We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness, and overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed to acknowledge that this chariot-drive was

<sup>1</sup> A Chinese philosopher, the founder of Taoism, lived about the 6th century, B.C.



progress, and that progress was civilization. If we ever ventured to ask, 'Progress towards what, and progress for whom,' it was considered to be peculiarly and ridiculously oriental to entertain such doubts about the absoluteness of progress. Of late, a voice has come to us bidding us to take count not only of the scientific perfection of the chariot but of the depth of the ditches lying across its path.

Lately I read a paragraph in the *Nation*—the American weekly which is more frank than prudent in its espousal of truth—discussing the bombing of the Mahsud<sup>1</sup> villages in Afghanistan by some British airmen. The incident commented upon by this paper happened when 'one of the bombing planes made a forced landing in the middle of a Mahsud village,' and when 'the airmen emerged unhurt from the wreckage only to face a committee of five or six old women, who had happened to escape the bombs, brandishing dangerous-looking knives.' The editor quotes from the *London Times* which runs thus :

'A delightful damsel took the airmen under her wing and led them to a cave close by, and a *malik* (chieftain) took up his position at the entrance, keeping off the crowd of forty who had gathered round, shouting and waving knives. Bombs were still being dropped from the air, so the crowd, envious of the security of the cave, pressed in stiflingly, and the airmen pushed their way out in the teeth of the hostile demonstration. . . . They

<sup>1</sup> The name of a tribe on the North-Western frontier of India.

were fed and were visited by neighbouring *maliks*, who were most friendly, and by a *mullah* (priest), who was equally pleasant. Women looked after the feeding arrangements, and supplies from Ladha and Razmak arrived safely. . . . On the evening of the twenty-fourth they were escorted to Ladha, where they arrived at daybreak the next day. The escort disguised their captives as Mahsuds as a precaution against attack. . . . It is significant that the airmen's defenders were first found in the younger generation of both sexes.'

In the above narrative the fact comes out strongly that the West has made wonderful progress. She has opened her path across the ethereal region of the earth ; the explosive force of the bomb has developed its mechanical power of wholesale destruction to a degree that could be represented in the past only by the personal valour of a large number of men. But such enormous progress has made Man diminutive. He proudly imagines that he expresses himself when he displays the things that he produces and the power that he holds in his hands. The bigness of the results and the mechanical perfection of the apparatus hide from him the fact that the Man in him has been smothered.

When I was a child I had the freedom to make my own toys out of trifles and create my own games from imagination. In my happiness my playmates had their full share ; in fact the complete enjoyment of my games depended upon their taking part in them. One day, in this paradise of our childhood,

entered a temptation from the market world of the adult.

A toy bought from an English shop was given to one of our companions ; it was perfect, it was big, wonderfully life-like. He became proud of the toy and less mindful of the game ; he kept that expensive thing carefully away from us, glorying in his exclusive possession of it, feeling himself superior to his playmates whose toys were cheap. I am sure if he could use the modern language of history he would say that he was more civilized than ourselves to the extent of his owning that ridiculously perfect toy.

One thing he failed to realize in his excitement—a fact which at the moment seemed to him insignificant—that this temptation obscured something a great deal more perfect than his toy, the revelation of the perfect child. The toy merely expressed his wealth, but not the child's creative spirit, not the child's generous joy in his play, his open invitation to all who were his compeers to his play-world.

Those people who went to bomb the Mahsud villages measured their civilization by the perfect effectiveness of their instruments which were their latest scientific toys. So strongly do they realize the value of these things that they are ready to tax to the utmost limit of endurance their own people, as well as those others who may occasionally have the chance to taste in their own persons the deadly perfection of these machines. This tax does not merely consist in money but in humanity. These

people put the birth-rate of the toy against the death-rate of man ; and they seem happy. Their science makes their prodigious success so utterly cheap on the material side, that they do not care to count the cost which their spirit has to bear.

On the other hand, those Mahsuds that protected the airmen—who had come to kill them—were primitively crude in their possession of life's toys. But they showed the utmost carefulness in proving the human truth through which they could express their personality. From the so-called Nordic point of view, the point of view of the would-be rulers of men, this was foolish.

According to a Mahsud, hospitality is a quality by which he is known as a man and therefore he cannot afford to miss his opportunity, even when dealing with someone who can be systematically relentless in enmity. From the practical point of view, the Mahsud pays for this very dearly, as we must always pay for that which we hold most valuable. It is the mission of civilization to set for us the right standard of valuation. The Mahsud may have many faults for which he should be held accountable ; but that, which has imparted for him more value to hospitality than to revenge, may not be called progress, but is certainly civilization.

The ruthlessness, which at a time of crisis disdains to be too scrupulous in extirpating some cause of trouble, and uses its indiscriminate weapon against the guilty and the innocent, the combatant and the non-combatant, is certainly useful. Through such thoroughly unfeeling methods men prosper; they

find what they consider desirable, they conquer their enemies—but there they stop, incomplete.

We can imagine some awful experiment in creation that began at the tail end and abruptly stopped when the stomach was finished. The creature's power of digestion is perfect, so it goes on growing stout, but the result is not beautiful. At the beginning of the late war, when monstrosities of this description appeared in various forms, Western humanity shrank for a moment at the sight. But now she seems to admire them, for they are fondly added to other broods of ugliness in her nursery. Terrific movements, produced by such abnormalities of truncated life, may widen the path of what is called progress for those who want to be rulers of men, but certainly they do not belong to civilization.

Once there was an occasion for me to motor down to Calcutta from a place a hundred miles away. Something wrong with the mechanism made it necessary for us to have a repeated supply of water almost every half an hour. At the first village where we were compelled to stop, we asked the help of a man to find water for us. It proved quite a task for him, but when we offered him his reward, poor though he was, he refused to accept it. In fifteen other villages the same thing happened. In a hot country where travellers constantly need water, and where the water supply grows scanty in summer, the villagers consider it their duty to offer water to those who need it. They could easily make a business out of it, following the inexorable law of demand and supply. But the ideal which they

consider to be their *dharma* has become one with their life. To ask them to sell it is like asking them to sell their life. They do not claim any personal merit for possessing it.

To be able to take a considerable amount of trouble in order to supply water to a passing stranger and yet never to claim merit or reward for it seems absurdly and negligibly simple compared with the capacity to produce an amazing number of things per minute. A millionaire tourist ready to corner the food market and grow rich by driving the whole world to the brink of starvation is sure to feel too superior to notice this simple thing while rushing through our villages at sixty miles an hour. For it is not aggressive like a telegraph pole that pokes our attention with its hugely long finger, or resounding like his own motor engine that shouts its discourtesy to the silent music of the spheres.

Yes, it is simple ; but that simplicity is the product of centuries of culture ; that simplicity is difficult of imitation. In a few years' time it might be possible for me to learn how to make holes in thousands of needles instantaneously by turning a wheel, but to be absolutely simple in one's hospitality to one's enemy or to a stranger requires generations of training. Simplicity takes no account of its own value, claims no wages, and therefore those who are enamoured of power do not realize that simplicity of spiritual expression is the highest product of civilization.

A process of disintegration can kill this rare fruit of a higher life, as a whole race of birds possessing

some rare beauty can be made extinct, by the vulgar power of avarice which has civilized weapons. This fact was clearly proved to me when I found that the only place where a price was expected for the water given to us was when we reached a suburb of Calcutta, where life was richer, the water supply easier and more abundant, and where progress flowed in numerous channels in all directions.

We have heard from the scientist that an atom consists of a nucleus drawing its companions round it in a rhythm of dance and thus forms a perfect unit. A civilization remains healthy and strong as long as it contains in its centre some creative ideal that binds its members in a rhythm of relationship. It is a relationship which is beautiful and not merely utilitarian. When this creative ideal which is *dharma* gives place to some overmastering passion, then this civilization bursts into conflagration like a star that has lighted its own funeral pyre. From its modest moderation of light this civilization flares up into a blaze of the first magnitude, only for its boisterous brilliancy to end in violent extinction.

Western society, for some ages, had for its central motive force a great spiritual ideal and not merely an impetus to progress. It had its religious faith which was actively busy in bringing about reconciliation among the conflicting forces of society. What it held to be of immense value was the perfection of human relationship, to be obtained by controlling the egoistic instincts of man, and by giving him a philosophy of his fundamental unity.

In the course of the last two centuries, however, the West found access to Nature's storehouse of power, and ever since all its attention has irresistibly been drawn in that direction. Its inner ideal of civilization has thus been pushed aside by the love of power.

Man's ideal has for its field of activity the whole of human nature from its depth to its height. The light of this ideal is gentle because diffused, its life is subdued because all-embracing. It is serene because it is great ; it is meek because it is comprehensive. But our passion is narrow ; its limited field gives it an intensity of impulse. Such an aggressive force of greed has of late possessed the Western mind. This has happened within a very short period, and has created a sudden deluge of things smothering all time and space over the earth. All that was human is being broken into fragments.

In trying to maintain some semblance of unity among such a chaos of fractions, organizations are established for manufacturing, in a wholesale quantity, peace, or piety, or social welfare. But such organizations can never have the character of a perfect unit. Surely they are needed as we need our drinking vessels, but more for the water than for ourselves. They are mere burdens by themselves as they are ; and if we take pleasure in multiplying them indefinitely the result may be astoundingly clever, but crushingly fatal to life.

I have read somewhere an observation of Plato in which he says : ' An intelligent and socialized



community will continue to grow only as long as it can remain a unit ; beyond that point growth must cease, or the community will disintegrate and cease to be an organic being.' That spirit of the unit is only maintained when its nucleus is some living sentiment of *dharma*, leading to co-operation and to a common sharing of life's gifts.

Lao-tze has said : *Not knowing the eternal causes passions to rise : and that is evil.* Comforts and conveniences are pursued, things are multiplied, the eternal is obscured, the passions are roused, and the evil marches triumphant from continent to continent mutilating man and crushing under its callous tread life's bloom—the product of the Mother-heart that dwells in the sanctuary of human nature. And we are asked to build triumphal arches for this march of death. Let us at least refuse to acknowledge its victory, even if we cannot retard its progress. Let us die, as your Lao-tze has said, and yet not perish.

It is said in our scriptures : *In greed is sin, in sin, death.* Your philosopher has said : *No greater calamity than greed.* These sentences carry the wisdom of ages. When greed becomes the dominant character of a people it forebodes destruction for them, and no mere organization like the League of Nations can ever save them. To let the flood of self-seeking flow unchecked from the heart of the nation and at the same time try to build an outer dam across its path can never succeed. The deluge will burst forth with a greater force because of the resistance. Lao-tze says : *Not self-seeking, he gaineth*

*life.* Life's principle is in this, and therefore in a society all the trainings and teachings that make for life are those that help us in our control of selfish greed.

When civilization was living, that is to say, when most of its movements were related to an inner ideal and not to an external compulsion, then money had not the same value as it has now. Do you not realize what an immense difference that fact has made in our life, and how barbarously it has cheapened those things which are invaluable in our inheritance? We have grown so used to this calamitous change that we do not fully realize the indignity it imposes upon us.

I ask you to imagine a day, if it does ever come, when in a meeting everybody will leave his chair and stand up in awe if a man enters there who has a greater number of human skulls strung in his necklace than have his fellow-beings. We can have no hesitation to-day in admitting that this would be pure barbarism. Are there no other tokens of a similar degradation for man—are there no other forms of human skulls than those which the savages so proudly wear?

In olden times the mere hoarding of millions was never considered as wealth unless it had some crown of glory with which to proclaim its ideal greatness. In the East as well as in the West, man, in order to save his inherent dignity, positively despised money that represented merely a right of possession and no moral responsibility. Money-making as a profession was everywhere contemptuously treated,

and men who made big profits the sole end of their life were looked down upon.

There was a time in India when our Brahmins were held in reverence, not only for their learning and purity of life, but for their utter indifference to material wealth. This only shows that our society was fully conscious that its very life depended upon its ideals, which were never to be insulted by anything that belonged to a passion for self-seeking. But because to-day progress is considered to be characteristic of civilization, and because this progress goes on gathering an unending material extension, money has established its universal sovereignty. For in this world of ambition money is the central power-house sending impulsions in all directions. ✓

In former days, the monarchs of men were not ashamed humbly to pay their respect to men of intellect or those who had spiritual or creative gifts. For the qualities of the higher life were the motive force of the civilization of those times. But to-day, men, whatever their position, never think that they are humiliating themselves when they offer their homage to men of corpulent cash, not always because they expect any benefit therefrom, but because of the bare fact of its possession. This denotes a defeat of the complete man by the material man. This huge degradation, like a slimy reptile, has spread its coils round the whole human world. Before we can rescue humanity from the bondage of its interminable tail, we must free our mind from the sacrilege of worship offered to this unholy power,

this evil dragon which can never be the presiding deity of the civilization of man.

I am sure you know that this soulless progeny of greed has already opened its elastic jaws wide over the fair limbs of your country, wider perhaps than in any other part of the world. I earnestly hope that you will develop some means to rescue her from her destination towards the hollow of its interior.

But the danger is not so much from the enemy who attacks, but from the defender who may betray. It fills my heart with a great feeling of dismay when, among your present generation of young men, I see signs of their succumbing to the depravity of fascination for an evil power which allures with its enormity. They go about seeking for civilization amongst the wilderness of sky-scrapers, in the shrieking headlines of news-journals, and the shouting vociferation of demagogues. They leave their own great prophets who had a far-seeing vision of truth, and roam in the dusk begging for the loan of light from some glow-worm which can only hold its niggardly lantern for the purpose of crawling towards its nearest dust.

They will learn the meaning of the word civilization when they come back home and truly understand what their great master, Lao-tze, wanted to teach when he said : *Those who have virtue attend to their obligations ; those who have no virtue attend to their claims.* In this saying he has expressed in a few words what I have tried to explain in this paper. Progress which is not related to an inner ideal, but

to an attraction which is external, seeks to satisfy our endless claims. But civilization which is an ideal gives us power and joy to fulfil our obligations.

About the stiffening of life and hardening of heart caused by the organization of power and production, he says with profound truth :

*The grass as well as the trees, while they live, are tender and supple ; when they die they are rigid and dry. Thus the hard and the strong are the companions of death. The tender and the delicate are the companions of life. Therefore, he who in arms is strong will not conquer. The strong and the great stay below. The tender and the delicate stay above.*

Our sage in India says, as I have quoted before : *By the help of anti-dharma men prosper, they find what they desire, they conquer enemies, but they perish at the root.* The wealth which is not welfare grows with a rapid vigour, but it carries within itself the seed of death. This wealth has been nourished in the West by the blood of men, and the harvest is ripening. The same warning was also given centuries ago by your sage when he said : *Things thrive and then grow old. This is called Un-Reason. Un-Reason soon ceases.*

Our living society, which should have dance in its steps, music in its voice, beauty in its limbs, which should have its metaphor in stars and flowers, maintaining its harmony with God's creation, becomes, under the tyranny of a prolific greed, like an overlaid market-cart jolting and

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creaking on the road that leads from things to the Nothing, tearing ugly ruts across the green life till it breaks down under the burden of its vulgarity on the wayside, reaching nowhere. For, *this is called Un-Reason*, as your teacher has said, *and Un-Reason soon ceases.*

## CONSTRUCTION VERSUS CREATION<sup>1</sup>

CONSTRUCTION is for a purpose, it expresses our wants ; but creation is for itself, it expresses our very being. We make a vessel because water has to be fetched. It must answer the question why. But when we take infinite trouble to give it a beautiful form, no reason has to be assigned. It is something which is ultimate; it is for the realization of our own spirit which is free, which is glad. If, in the works of our life, needs make themselves too domineering, purposes too obtrusive, if something of our complete humanity is not expressed at the same time, then these works become ugly and unspiritual.

In love, in goodness, man himself is revealed ; these express no want in him ; they show the fulness of his nature which flows out of himself and therefore they are purely creative. They are ultimate—therefore, in our judgment of man's civilization, they give us the true criterion of perfection.

Creation is the revelation of truth through the rhythm of forms. It has a dualism consisting of

<sup>1</sup> *An address delivered at the Gujarati Literary Conference, Ahmedabad, India, in 1920.*

the expression and the material. Of these two wedded companions the material must keep in the background and continually offer itself as a sacrifice to its absolute loyalty to the expression. And this is true of all things, whether in our individual life or in our society.

When the material makes itself too aggressive and furiously multiplies itself into unmeaning voluminousness, then the harmony of creation is disturbed and truth is obscured. If the lamp takes a perverse pride in displaying its oil, then the light remains unrevealed. The material must know that it has no idea of completeness in itself, that it must not hold out temptations to decoy men under its destination away from their creative activities.

The laws of grammar are necessary for the construction of a poem, but the readers must not be made conscious of their constant dictatorship. In classical India we have a Sanskrit poem in which all the complex grammatical rules are deliberately illustrated. This gives continual shocks of delight to a class of readers who, even in a work of art, seek some tangible proof of power almost physical in its manifestation. This proves that by special cultivation a kind of mentality can be produced which is strangely capable of taking delight in contemplating the mere spectacle of power manipulating materials, forgetting that materials are not the truth. And these people of an athletic habit of mind encourage artists to sacrifice art to the vanity of performance, simplicity of truth to the antics of cleverness.



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What is the truth of the world ? Its truth is not the mass of materials, but their universal relatedness. A drop of water is not a particular assortment of elements, it is their mutuality. In fact matter, as a mass, is an abstraction to us ; we know it by a betrayal of secret through science. We do not directly perceive it. We see a flower, but not matter. Matter in a laboratory has its use but no expression. This expression alone is creation ; it is an end in itself. So also does our civilization find its completeness when it expresses humanity, not when it displays its power to amass materials.

I have said that the truth of this world is in its law of relatedness, that is to say, the law of keeping step together. For the world is a movement, and this movement must not be retarded in any of its parts by a break of cadence. The world of men is suffering the agony of pain, because its movements are not in harmony with one another, because the relationship of races has not yet been established in a balance of beauty and goodness. This balance cannot be maintained by external regulation. It is a dance which must have music to regulate it. This great music is lacking in the historical meeting of man which has taken place in the present age, and all its movements in their incongruity are creating complexities of pain.

We know of an instance in our own history of India when a great personality<sup>1</sup> struck up in his life and voice the key-note of the solemn music of man-love for all creatures. And that music

<sup>1</sup> Gautama Buddha.

crossed the sea and the mountain and the desert, and races belonging to different climes and habits and languages were drawn together, not in a clash of arms or in the conflict of exploitation but in co-operation of life, in amity and peace. This was a creation. The great rhythm of this symphony was in the very heart of the world. This rhythm is what metre is to a poem, not a mere enclosure for keeping ideas from running off in disorder, but a vitalizing force, making them indivisible in a unity of creation.

When humanity lacks this music of soul, then society becomes a mechanical arrangement of compartments, of political and social classifications. Such a machine is a mere aping of creation, and not having unity at its heart it enforces it in its outer structure for mere convenience. In it the life that grows and feels is hurt, and either is crushed into insensibility or breaks out in constant convulsions.

The vital harmony is lacking to-day in unity of man, for the formalness of law and regulation has displaced the living ideal of personality from human affairs, and science has taken the office of religion in man's greatest creative work, his civilization.

The diversion of man's energy to the outside is producing an enormous quantity of materials which may give rise in us to the pride of power but not the joy of life. The hugeness of things is every day overaweing the greatness of man, and the gap between matter and life is growing wider. For when things become too many, they refuse to be completely assimilated to life, thus becoming its

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most dangerous rival, as is an excessively large pile of fuel to the fire.

Expression belongs to a different plane from that of its material. Our physical body has its elaborate mechanism for its various vital needs. Yet the wholeness of our body, where it is an expression, where it is one with our personality, is absolutely different in its aspect and meaning from the muscular, vascular or nervous system, and it keeps its veil strictly drawn. The physiological mechanism as an organ of efficiency carefully exacts from its means and methods their full equivalents in results. But the body is more than this mechanism, it is divine. An exhaustive list of all its functions fails to give us its definiteness. It is a creation and not a mere construction, rising far above its purposes and composition. Creation is infinitely in excess of all measurements, it is the immaterial in matter.

In all art every display of power is vulgar, and a true artist is humble in his creation. He despises making a show of material in his work and a parade of the difficulties of its process. For the power which accumulates things and manipulates them is fundamentally different from the power which transmutes them into the perfection of a creative unity.

And God is humble in His creation. He does not keep His muscles bared, nor does He go out of His way to attract our attention to His store of things or account-book of their cost. He gives out Himself in the abundance of His nature.

It is the final object of man to prove his similarity

of nature with God by his fulness of truth, by his creativeness. Whatever he does solely in obedience to natural law, goaded by hunger or other compulsions, he feels at heart to be alien to his own nature. He somehow feels a shame about their evidence in his life and tries to put a cover over it, some cover fashioned by his own creative mind.

For instance, in his necessity for eating there is no difference between man and other creatures, yet he seems unwilling fully to acknowledge this and consequently tries to hide away the hunger element from his meals till it is almost lost to sight. He takes endless care to make his food ornamental and likewise the vessel out of which he takes it. And so, with regulations and designs of his own make, he sets up an elaborate pretension that he is not busy satisfying any legitimate need of the physiological nature.

This is the process by which the unnecessary has assumed an enormously greater proportion than the necessary in our civilization. In its own turn it begets the danger of burdening us with fixed necessities of habit which have not the sanction of nature nor that of our creative freedom but get merely piled up into a refuse heap of conventionality.

It may be said that as life is a growth it cannot have a completeness of expression and, therefore, its only true expression is vigour. As intensity of passion leading to a variety of emotional experiences, and adventures of mind giving rise to a wealth of power and production, constitute what they call living, vigour of feeling and intellect is no doubt a

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great asset of life. But life, merely taken as a force, is elemental, it is not human. It has its use like steam and electricity, but there is no ideal of perfection in it. Those who make such life an object of their worship lose all pity for the personal man and have no compunction in sacrificing individuals to their blind infatuation for power and experiences. And I repeat it once again that life can only become an end in itself when it is a creation, just as the elements that go to the composition of a flower are fulfilled only when they are a flower.

Growth there must be in life. But growth does not mean an enlargement through additions. Things, such as masonry-structure, which have to be constructed by a gradual building up of materials, do not show their perfection until they are completed. But living things start with their wholeness from the beginning of their growth. Life is a continual process of synthesis. A child is complete in itself ; it does not wait for the perfection of its lovability till it has come to the end of its childhood. The enjoyment of a song begins from the beginning of the singing and continually follows its course to the end. But the man whose sole concern is the acquisition of power or material deals with a task which is cursed with eternal incompleteness. For things find no meaning in themselves when their magnitude consists solely of accumulated bulk. They acquire truth only when they are assimilated to a living idea. This assimilation becomes impossible so long as the passion for acquisition occupies all our mind, when there is no large leisure

for life force to pursue its own great work of self-creation.

There was a time when commerce was restricted to a narrow circle in society, and was meek enough to acknowledge its limitations. In spite of its usefulness men treated it with condescension, even with disrespect. This was because man tried to maintain an imperious aloofness from all exacting needs, and, while accepting their services, he refused to do homage to them. I believe and hope that in the range of all literature and art there is no single instance of a monied man being glorified for the mere sake of his money. Our Laxmi<sup>1</sup> is not the goddess of the cash balance in the bank : she is the symbol of that ideal plenitude which is never dissociated from goodness and beauty.

But in recent centuries has come a devastating change in our mentality with regard to the acquisition of money. We not only pursue it but bend our knees to it. For us its call has become the loudest of all voices, reaching even the sanctuaries of our temples. That it should be allowed a sufficiently large place in society there can be no question, but it becomes an outrage when it occupies those seats which are specially reserved for the immortals, by bribing us, by tampering with our moral pride, by recruiting the best strength of society on its side in a traitor's campaign against human ideals, disguising with the help of pageantry and pomp its innate insignificance.

Such a state has come to pass because, with the

<sup>1</sup> The Hindu goddess of abundance and fortune, wife of Vishnu.

help of science, the possibility of profit has suddenly become immoderate. The whole of human society throughout its length and breadth has felt the gravitational pull of a giant planet of greed with its concentric rings of innumerable satellites. It has carried to our society a distinct deviation from its moral orbit, its mental balance being upset and its aspirations brought down to the dust. This is why never before in our history have our best instincts and endeavours been so openly flouted as a sickness of a rickety sentimentalism. And what is becoming a constant source of disaster for humanity is the incessant hypnotism of money and its secret action upon the mind. It manufactures opinions, it navigates newspapers through tortuous channels of suppression of truth and exaggeration, it pulls most of the strings of politics, it secretly maintains all kinds of slavery under all varieties of masks. In former times the intellectual and spiritual powers of this earth upheld their dignity of independence, but to-day, as in the fatal stage of disease, the influence of money has got into our brain and affected our heart.

Any impetuosity of passion that tends to overwhelm social equilibrium not only produces moral callousness but destroys our reverence for beauty. The truth of this was made evident to us when I set out from Calcutta on my voyage to Japan. The first thing that shocked me with a sense of personal injury was the sight of the ruthless intrusion of factories on both banks of the Ganges, where they are most unbecoming in their brazen-faced effron-

tery. The blow which it gave to me was owing to the precious memory of the days of my boyhood when the scenery of this river was the only great thing near my birthplace reminding me of the existence of a world made by God's own hands. You all know that Calcutta is an upstart town with no depth of sentiment in her face or in her manners. It may truly be said about its genesis, that in the beginning there was the spirit of the shop which uttered through its megaphone, 'Let there be the office,' and there was Calcutta. She brought with her no dowry of distinctions, no majesty of a noble or romantic origin. She never gathered round her any great historical associations, annals of brave sufferings or memory of mighty deeds done. The only thing which gave her the sacred baptism of beauty was the river, which carried the voice of the Genius of our race from an immortal past singing of its aspiration of the boundless. I was fortunate enough to be born before the smoke-belching Iron Dragon had devoured the greater part of the life on its banks ; when the landing stairs descending into its water, caressed by its tide, appeared to me like the loving arms of the villages clinging to it.

I am afraid my complaint will evoke a feeling of pitying amusement in the minds of all sober people when these words reach them. To condemn the impairing of the beauty of a river bank and to overlook the substantial fact of the production of a prodigious quantity of gunny bags will sound too exquisitely unpractical to be able to cause any serious harm !



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But as an instance of the contrast of the different ideal of a different age as incarnated in the form of a town, the memory of my last visit to Benares comes to my mind. What impressed me most deeply while I was there was the mother-call of the river Ganges which ever filled the atmosphere with an 'unheard melody,' attracting the whole population to its bosom every hour of the day. I am proud of the fact that India has felt a most profound love for this river which nourished her civilization on its banks, guiding its course from the majestic silence of the Himalayas to the sea with its myriad voices of solitude. This feeling of love is different in a great measure from the modern sentiment of patriotism. It is not too definitely associated with a particular geography or a limited series of political events. It represents the sub-conscious memory of a whole country, of her ages of endeavour after spiritual emancipation.

But what about our gunny bags? Sentiments are fine, but gunny bags are indispensable. I admit it, and am willing to allow them a place in society (but in strictly modest moderation), if my opponent will only admit that even gunny bags should have their limits and acknowledge the full worth of man who needs leisure and space for his joy and worship. But if this concession to humanity be denied or curtailed, and if profit and production are allowed to run amuck, they play havoc with our love of beauty, of truth, of justice and with our love for our fellow-beings. That man is brave, that he is social, that he is religious, that he is the seeker

of the unknown—these have some aspect of the complete in them ; but that he is a manufacturer of gunny bags and other articles has not in itself any idea of an organic wholeness. Therefore utility should never forget its subordinate position in human affairs : it must not be permitted to occupy more than its legitimate place and powers in society, nor to have the liberty to desecrate the poetry of life, or to deaden our sensitiveness to ideals, bragging of our coarseness as a sign of virility and bespattering with the mud of mockery our spiritual nature. That would be like allowing a rugged boulder to sneer at and browbeat the living perfection of a flower.

We have our out-offices in the back yard of our houses. And because they disturb the unity of the idea which is our home, we keep a line of separateness between the outside help bought with money and services of kinship, between necessity and sentiment. But the home gives way to the office if the necessity becomes overwhelming. This has made our modern civilization all out-offices, to which home is an adjunct. Modern civilization has become Shudra <sup>1</sup> in its character.

For the name Shudra symbolizes one who is merely useful, in whom the man who is above usefulness is not recognized. The word Shudra denotes a classification which includes all named machines who have lost the decency of humanity, be their works manual or intellectual. They are like a walking stomach, or brain, and we feel, in pity,

<sup>1</sup> Servile caste whose duty is to serve the three higher castes according to the Hindu code of Manu.

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urged to call on God to make them into a man. When man adopted his ideals he did not give success a place of distinction ; and even in war he held the ideal of honour above that of success. But success which is Shudra, and whose dwelling is in the office, has arrogantly come into the front. And if through its incessant touch of defilement we contract the ugly habit of deriding sentiments in favour of materials, then the slave dynasty will be confirmed for ever.

This is the root of the struggle of the present age. Man is refusing to accept for good his position as Shudra, and our civilization is feeling ashamed of the degradation imposed upon it by the lust of power and money.

In the old time when commerce was a member of the normal life of man, there ruled the spirit of Laxmi, who with her divine touch of humanity saved wealth from the unseemliness of rampant individualism, mean both in motive and method. Venice had very little that was deformed and discordant ; Samarkand and Bokhara had in them the richness of human associations. We can imagine what Delhi and Agra must have been in the time to which they belonged. They manifested in their development some creatively human aspect of a great empire. Whatever might have been its character, even in their decay they still retain their magnificence which was the true product of the self-respect of man.

Then think of Calcutta, which on one side has its squalid congeries of clerks clinging to the meagre

and precarious livelihood short of all margin for beauty and joy accorded to them in a niggardly spirit of utilitarianism, and on the other its pompously formal rows of buildings sheltering a nomadic swarm of money-mongers—with no human link between them, with no common sharing of social amenities. This is the hideousness of modern commerce—it does not stimulate men into a healthy and normal activity of production but organizes and makes use of them by mixing and mangling their minds ; it is shabbily parsimonious in all that is connected with human life and extravagant in all that tends to the multiplying of market wares.

I do not for a moment mean to imply that in any particular period of their history men were free from the disturbances of their lower passions. Selfishness ever had its share in their government and trade. Yet there was a struggle for maintaining a balance of forces in our society, and our passions with their rude strength cherished no delusions about their own rank and value, and contrived no clever devices to hoodwink our moral nature. For in those days our intellect was not so tempted to put its weight into the balance on the side of over-greed.

But now our passion for power and money has no equal in the field. It has not only science for its ally, but also other forces that have some semblance of religion, such as nation-worship and the idealizing of self-interest.

Science is producing a habit of mind which is ever weakening in us this spiritual standpoint of

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truth that has its foundation in our sense of a person as the ultimate and innermost reality of existence. Science has its true sphere in analysing this world as a construction just as a grammarian has his legitimate mission in analysing the syntax of a poem. But the world as a creation is not a construction ; it is also more than its syntax. It is a poem, which we are apt to forget when, by exclusive attention, grammar takes complete possession of our mind.

Upon the loss of the sense of religion, the reign of the machine and of method has been firmly established. It is the simplification of man by jettisoning a great part of his treasure ; spiritually speaking, he has been made a homeless tramp, getting a freedom which is negative because superficial. Its concentrated hurt had been felt by all the world in the late war. Freed from the bond of spiritual relationship as the medium of the brotherhood of man, the different sections of society are continually being resolved into their elemental character of forces. Labour is a force, and also capital ; so are the Government and the people, the man and the woman. It is said that when the forces lying latent even in a handful of dust are liberated from their bond of unity, which is their bond of creation, they can lift St. Paul's Cathedral to the height of a mountain. Such disfranchised forces roving as irresponsible freebooters may be useful to us for certain purposes, but St. Paul's Cathedral is, generally speaking, better for us standing secure on its foundation than shattered

into pieces and scattered in the void. To own the secret of mastering these forces is a proud fact for us, but the power of self-control and self-sacrifice within is a truer subject of exultation for mankind. The genii of the *Arabian Nights* may have their lure and fascination for us, but God is infinitely more precious for imparting to our society its spiritual power of creation. But these genii are abroad everywhere ; and even after their death-dance in the late war, incantations addressed to them are secretly being muttered, and their red-robed devotees are still getting ready to play tricks upon humanity by suddenly spiriting it away to some hill-top of desolation. The thunder-clouds of revolution which are ominously gathering and flashing their angry teeth and growling, are the outcome of a long process of separation of human personality from human power, reducing man into a ghost of abstraction.

Modern science has outwardly brought all mankind close together. The situation requires the spiritual realization of some great truth of relationship to save human societies from constant conflict of interest and friction of pride. The people who are mere forces, when not organically united, must prove their humanity by some creative transfusion. This is not a mere problem of construction, and therefore does not chiefly fall within the province of science, which deals merely with discovery and invention and not with creation. The outer bonds of telegraph wires and railway lines have helped men all the more efficiently to tear one another to

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pieces and to rob their weaker fellow-beings of food, of freedom, and of self-respect. Must the sword continue to rule for ever and not the sceptre, and must science after her great achievement of mastering the geography of the earth remain at the head of the administration? Can she establish peace and unity in this world of diverse races? Has it not been sufficiently proved that her material law of ruthless skilfulness can only commandeer the genii of power for her agents but cannot conjure up that spirit of creation which is the love of God and man? And yet science does not show any sign of vacating her seat in favour of humanity or submit to any curtailment of her jurisdiction after her own proper work has been finished. The powerful races who have the scientific mind and method and machinery have taken upon themselves the immense responsibility of the present age. We complain not of their law and government, which are scientifically efficient, but of the desolating deadliness of their machine domination. These people in their dealings with subject races all over the world forget that science and law are not a perfect medium for human communication. They refuse to acknowledge what an ordeal it can be for human beings meekly to have to receive gifts from animated pigeon-holes or condescension from a steam-engine of the latest type. We feel the withering fierceness of the spirit of modern civilization all the more because it beats directly against our human sensibility; and it is we of the Eastern hemisphere who have the right to say that those who represent this

great age of great opportunities are furiously building their doom by their renouncement of the divine ideal of personality ; for the ultimate truth in man is not in his intellect or in his material wealth ; it is in his imagination of sympathy, in his illumination of heart, in his activities of self-sacrifice, in his capacity for extending love far and wide across all barriers of caste and colour, in his realizing this world not as a storehouse of mechanical power but as a habitation of man's soul with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of a divine presence.



## WHAT IS ART ? <sup>1</sup>

THE question has been asked, 'What is Art ?' and answers have been given by various persons. They aim at supplying us with very definite standards by which to guide our judgment of art productions. Therefore we have heard judges in the modern time giving verdict, according to some special rules of their own making, for the dethronement of immortals whose supremacy has been unchallenged for centuries.

This meteorological disturbance in the atmosphere of art criticism, whose origin is in the West, has crossed over to our own shores in Bengal, bringing mist and clouds in its wake, where there was a clear sky. We have begun to ask ourselves whether creations of art should not be judged either according to their fitness to be universally understood, or their philosophical interpretation of life, or their usefulness for solving the problems of the day, or their giving expression to something which is peculiar to the genius of the people to which the artist belongs. Therefore when men are seriously engaged in fixing the standard of value in art by something which is not inherent in it—or, in other words,

<sup>1</sup> *A lecture delivered in America, published in 'Personality'.*

when the excellence of the river is going to be judged by the point of view of a canal—we cannot leave the question to its fate, but must take our part in the deliberations.

Should we begin with a definition? But definition of a thing which has a life growth is really limiting one's own vision in order to be able to see clearly. And clearness is not necessarily the only, or the most important, aspect of truth. A bull's-eye lantern view is a clear view, but not a complete view. If we are to know a wheel in motion, we need not mind if all its spokes cannot be counted. When not merely the accuracy of shape, but velocity of motion, is important, we have to be content with a somewhat imperfect definition of the wheel. Living things have far-reaching relationships with their surroundings, some of which are invisible and go deep down into the soil. In our zeal for definition we may lop off branches and roots of a tree to turn it into a log, which is easier to roll about from classroom to classroom, and therefore suitable for a text-book. But because it allows a nakedly clear view of itself, it cannot be said that a log gives a truer view of a tree as a whole.

Therefore I shall not define Art, but question myself about the reason of its existence, and try to find out whether it owes its origin to some social purpose, or to the need of catering for our aesthetic enjoyment, or whether it has come out of some impulse of expression, which is the impulse of our being itself.

A fight has been going on for a long time round

the saying, 'Art for Art's sake,' which seems to have fallen into disrepute among a section of Western critics. It is a sign of the recurrence of the ascetic ideal of the puritanic age, when enjoyment as an end in itself was held to be sinful. But all puritanism is a reaction. It does not represent truth in its normal aspect. When enjoyment loses its direct touch with life, growing fastidious and fantastic in its world of elaborate conventions, then comes the call for renunciation which rejects happiness itself as a snare. I am not going into the history of your modern art, which I am not at all competent to discuss ; yet I can assert, as a general truth, that when a man tries to thwart himself in his desire for delight, converting it merely into his desire to know, or to do good, then the cause must be that his power of feeling delight has lost its natural bloom and healthiness.

The rhetoricians in old India had no hesitation in saying, that enjoyment is the soul of literature, — the enjoyment which is disinterested. But the word 'enjoyment' has to be used with caution. When analysed, its spectrum shows an endless series of rays of different colours and intensity throughout its different worlds of stars. The art world contains elements which are distinctly its own and which emit lights that have their special range and property. It is our duty to distinguish them and arrive at their origin and growth.

The most important distinction between the animal and man is this, that the animal is very nearly bound within the limits of its necessities, the

greater part of its activities being necessary for its self-preservation and the preservation of race. Like a retail shopkeeper, it has no large profit from its trade of life ; the bulk of its earnings must be spent in paying back the interest to its bank. Most of its resources are employed in the mere endeavour to live. But man, in life's commerce, is a big merchant. He earns a great deal more than he is absolutely compelled to spend. Therefore there is a vast excess of wealth in man's life, which gives him the freedom to be useless and irresponsible to a great measure. There are large outlying tracts, surrounding his necessities, where he has objects that are ends in themselves.

The animals must have knowledge, so that their knowledge can be employed for useful purposes of their life. But there they stop. They must know their surroundings in order to be able to take their shelter and seek their food, some properties of things in order to build their dwellings, some signs of the different seasons to be able to get ready to adapt themselves to the changes. Man also must know, because he must live. But man has a surplus where he can proudly assert that knowledge is for the sake of knowledge. There he has the pure enjoyment of his knowledge, because there knowledge is freedom. Upon this fund of surplus his science and philosophy thrive. . . .

Then again, there is a certain amount of altruism in the animal. It is the altruism of parenthood, the altruism of the herd and the hive. This altruism is absolutely necessary for race preservation. But

In man there is a great deal more than this. Though he also has to be good, because goodness is necessary for his race, yet he goes far beyond that. His goodness is not a small pittance, barely sufficient for a hand-to-mouth moral existence. He can amply afford to say that goodness is for the sake of goodness. And upon this wealth of goodness—where honesty is not valued for being the best policy, but because it can afford to go against all policies—man's ethics are founded.

The idea of 'Art for Art's sake' also has its origin in this region of the superfluous. Let us, therefore, try to ascertain what activity it is whose exuberance leads to the production of Art.

For man, as well as for animals, it is necessary to give expression to feelings of pleasure and displeasure, fear, anger and love. In animals, these emotional expressions have gone little beyond their bounds of usefulness. But in man, though they still have roots in their original purposes, they have spread their branches far and wide in the infinite sky high above their soil. Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not all occupied with his self-preservation. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man's civilization is built upon his surplus.

A warrior is not merely content with fighting, which is needful, but, by the aid of music and decorations, he must give expression to the heightened consciousness of the warrior in him, which is not only unnecessary but in some cases suicidal. The man who has a strong religious feeling

not only worships his deity with all care, but his religious personality craves, for its expression, the splendour of the temple, the rich ceremonials of worship.

When a feeling is aroused in our hearts which is far in excess of the amount that can be completely absorbed by the object which has produced it, it comes back to us and makes us conscious of ourselves by its return waves. When we are in poverty, all our attention is fixed outside us—upon the objects which we must acquire for our need. But when our wealth greatly surpasses our needs, its light is reflected back upon us, and we have the exultation of feeling that we are rich persons. This is the reason why, of all creatures, only man knows himself, because his impulse of knowledge comes back to him in its excess. He feels his personality more intensely than other creatures, because his power of feeling is more than can be exhausted by his objects. This efflux of the consciousness of his personality requires an outlet of expression. Therefore in Art man reveals himself and not his objects. His objects have their place in books of information and science, where he has completely to conceal himself.

Let us here consider what are the contents of this personality and how it is related to the outer world. This world appears to us as an individual, and not merely as a bundle of invisible forces. For this, as everybody knows, it is greatly indebted to our senses and our mind. This apparent world is man's world. It has taken its special features of shape,

colour and movement from the peculiar range and qualities of our perception. It is what our sense limits have specially acquired and built for us and walled up. Not only the physical and chemical forces, but man's perceptual forces, are its potent factors—because it is man's world, and not an abstract world of physics or metaphysics.

This world, which takes its form in the mould of man's perception, still remains only as the partial world of his senses and mind. It is like a guest and not like a kinsman. It becomes completely our own when it comes within the range of our emotions. With our love and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and wonder, continually working upon it, this world becomes a part of our personality. It grows with our growth, it changes with our changes. We are great or small, according to the magnitude and littleness of this assimilation, according to the quality of its sum total. If this world were taken away, our personality would lose all its content.

Our emotions are the gastric juices which transform this world of appearance into the more intimate world of sentiments. On the other hand, this outer world has its own juices, having their various qualities which excite our emotional activities. This is called in our Sanskrit rhetoric *rāsa*, which signifies outer juices having their response in the inner juices of our emotions. And a poem, according to it, is a sentence or sentences containing juices, which stimulate the juices of emotion. It brings to us ideas, vitalized by feelings, ready to be made into the life-stuff of our nature.

Bare information on facts is not literature, because it gives us merely the facts which are independent of ourselves. Repetition of the facts that the sun is round, water is liquid, fire is hot, would be intolerable. But a description of the beauty of the sunrise has its eternal interest for us, because there it is not the fact of the sunrise but its relation to ourselves which is the object of perennial interest.

It is said in the Upanishad that 'Wealth is dear to us, not because we desire the fact of the wealth itself, but because we desire ourselves.' This means that we feel ourselves in our wealth, and therefore we love it. The things which arouse our emotions arouse our own self-feeling. It is like our touch upon the harp-string ; if it is too feeble, then we are merely aware of the touch, but if it is strong, then our touch comes back to us in tunes and our consciousness is intensified.

But how can we express our personality, which we only know by feeling ? A scientist can make known what he has learned by analysis and experiment. But what an artist has to say, he cannot express by merely informing and explaining. The plainest language is needed when I have to say what I know about a rose, but to say what I feel about a rose is different. There it has nothing to do with facts, or with laws ; it deals with taste, which can be realized only by tasting. Therefore the Sanskrit rhetoricians say, in poetry we have to use words which have got the proper taste—which do not merely talk, but conjure up pictures and sing. For pictures and songs are not merely facts—they are



personal facts. They are not only themselves, but ourselves also. They defy analysis and they have immediate access to our hearts.

It has to be conceded that man cannot help revealing his personality also in the world of use. But there self-expression is not his primary object. In everyday life, when we are mostly moved by our habits, we are economical in our expression; for then our soul-consciousness is at its low level—it has just volume enough to glide on in accustomed grooves. But when our heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotions, our personality is in its flood-tide. Then it feels the longing to express itself for the very sake of expression. Then comes Art, and we forget the claims of necessity, the thrift of usefulness; the spires of our temples try to kiss the stars and the notes of our music to fathom the depth of the ineffable.

Man's energies, running on two parallel lines—that of utility and of self-expression—tend to meet and mingle. By constant human associations sentiments gather around our things of use and invite the help of art to reveal themselves—as we see the warrior's pride and love revealed in the ornamental sword-blade, and the comradeship of festive gatherings in the wine goblet.

The lawyer's office, as a rule, is not a thing of beauty, and the reason is obvious. But in a city, where men are proud of their citizenship, public buildings must in their structure express this love for the city. When the British capital was removed from Calcutta to Delhi, there was discussion about

the style of architecture which should be followed in the new buildings. Some advocated the Indian style of the Moghal period—the style which was the joint production of the Moghal and the Indian genius. The fact that they lost sight of was that all true art has its origin in sentiment. Moghal Delhi and Moghal Agra show their human personality in their buildings. Moghal emperors were men, they were not mere administrators. They lived and died in India, they loved and fought. The memorials of their reigns do not persist in the ruins of factories and offices, but in immortal works of art—not only in great buildings, but in pictures and music and workmanship in stone and metal, in cotton and wool fabrics. But the British Government in India is not personal. It is official, and therefore an abstraction. It has nothing to express in the true language of art. For law, efficiency and exploitation cannot sing themselves into epic stones. Lord Lytton, who unfortunately was gifted with more imagination than was necessary for an Indian Viceroy, tried to copy one of the state functions of the Moghals—the Durbar ceremony. But state ceremonials are works of art. They naturally spring from the reciprocity of personal relationship between the people and their monarch. When they are copies, they show all the signs of the spurious.

How utility and sentiment take different lines in their expression can be seen in the dress of a man compared with that of a woman. A man's dress, as a rule, shuns all that is unnecessary and merely

decorative. But a woman has naturally selected the decorative, not only in her dress, but in her manners. She has to be picturesque and musical to make manifest what she truly is, because, in her position in the world, woman is more concrete and personal than man. She is not to be judged merely by her usefulness, but by her delightfulness. Therefore she takes infinite care in expressing, not her profession, but her personality.

The principal object of art, also, being the expression of personality, and not of that which is abstract and analytical, it necessarily uses the language of picture and music. This has led to a confusion in our thought that the object of art is the production of beauty ; whereas beauty in art has been the mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance.

As a consequence of this, we have often heard it argued whether manner, rather than matter, is the essential element in art. Such arguments become endless, like pouring water into a vessel whose bottom has been taken away. These discussions owe their origin to the idea that beauty is the object of art, and, because mere matter cannot have the property of beauty, it becomes a question whether manner is not the principal factor in art.

But the truth is, analytical treatment will not help us in discovering what is the vital point in art. For the true principle of art is the principle of unity. When we want to know the food-value of certain of our diets, we find it in their component parts ; but its taste-value is in its unity, which cannot be

analysed. Matter, taken by itself, is an abstraction which can be dealt with by science ; while manner, which is merely manner, is an abstraction which comes under the laws of rhetoric. But when they are indissolubly one, then they find their harmonics in our personality, which is an organic complex of matter and manner, thoughts and things, motives and actions.

Therefore we find all abstract ideas are out of place in true art, where, in order to gain admission, they must come under the disguise of personification. This is the reason why poetry tries to select words that have vital qualities—words that are not for mere information, but have become naturalized in our hearts and have not been worn out of their shapes by too constant use in the market. For instance, the English word ‘consciousness’ has not yet outgrown the cocoon stage of its scholastic inertia, therefore it is seldom used in poetry ; whereas its Indian synonym ‘chetana’ is a vital word and is of constant poetical use. On the other hand, the English word ‘feeling’ is fluid with life, but its Bengali synonym ‘anubhūti’ is refused in poetry, because it merely has a meaning and no flavour. And likewise there are some truths, coming from science and philosophy, which have acquired life’s colour and taste, and some which have not. Until they have done this, they are, for art, like uncooked vegetables, unfit to be served at a feast. History, so long as it copies science and deals with abstractions, remains outside the domain of literature. But, as a narrative of facts, it takes

its place by the side of the epic poem. For narration of historical facts imparts to the time to which they belong a taste of personality. Those periods become human to us, we feel their living heart-beats.

The world and the personal man are face to face, like friends who question one another and exchange their inner secrets. The world asks the inner man, 'Friend, have you seen me ? Do you love me ?—not as one who provides you with foods and fruits, not as one whose laws you have found out, but as one who is personal, individual ?'

The artist's answer is, 'Yes, I have seen you, I have loved and known you—not that I have any need of you, not that I have taken you and used your laws for my own purposes of power. I know the forces that act and drive and lead to power, but it is not that. I see you, where you are, what I am.'

But how do you know that the artist has known, has seen, has come face to face with this Personality ?

When I first meet any one who is not yet my friend, I observe all the numberless unessential things which attract the attention at first sight ; and in the wilderness of that diversity of facts the friend who is to be my friend is lost.

When our steamer reached the coast of Japan, one of our passengers, a Japanese, was coming back home from Rangoon ; we, on the other hand, were reaching that shore for the first time in our life. There was a great difference in our outlook. We noted every little peculiarity, and innumerable small things occupied our attention. But the

Japanese passenger dived at once into the personality, the soul of the land, where his own soul found satisfaction. *He* saw fewer things, *we* saw more things ; but what he saw was the soul of Japan. It could not be gauged by any quantity or number, but by something invisible and deep. It could not be said, that because we saw those innumerable things, we saw Japan better, but rather the reverse.

If you ask me to draw some particular tree—and I am no artist—I try to copy every detail, lest I should otherwise lose the peculiarity of the tree, forgetting that the peculiarity is not the personality. But when the true artist comes, he overlooks all details and gets into the essential characterization. He looks on that tree as unique, not as the botanist who generalizes and classifies. It is the function of the artist to particularize that one tree.

The greatness and beauty of Oriental art, especially in Japan and China, consist in this, that there the artists have seen this soul of things and they believe in it. The West may believe in the Soul of Man, but she does not really believe that the universe has a soul. Yet this is the belief of the East, and the whole mental contribution of the East to mankind is filled with this idea. So we, in the East, need not go into details and emphasize them ; for the most important thing is this universal soul, for which the Eastern sages have sat in meditation, and Eastern artists have joined them in artistic realization.

Because we have faith in this universal soul, we

in the East know that Truth, Power, Beauty, lie in Simplicity—where it is transparent, where things do not obstruct the inner vision. Therefore, all our sages have tried to make their lives simple and pure, because thus they have the realization of a positive Truth, which, though invisible, is more real than the gross and the numerous.

When we say that art only deals with those truths that are personal, we do not exclude philosophical ideas which are apparently abstract. They are quite common in our Indian literature, because they have been woven with the fibres of our personal nature. I give here an instance which will make my point clear. The following is a translation of an Indian poem written by a woman poet of mediaeval India ; its subject is Life :

I salute the Life which is like a sprouting seed,  
With its one arm upraised in the air, and the other  
down in the soil ;

The Life which is one in its outer form and its inner sap ;  
The Life that ever appears, yet ever eludes.

The Life that comes I salute, and the Life that goes ;  
I salute the Life that is revealed and that is hidden ;  
I salute the Life in suspense, standing still like a  
mountain,

And the Life of the surging sea of fire ;  
The Life that is tender like a lotus, and hard like a  
thunderbolt.

I salute the Life which is of the mind, with its one side  
in the dark and the other in the light.

I salute the Life in the house and the Life abroad in the  
unknown,

The Life full of joy and the Life weary with its pains,  
The Life eternally moving, rocking the world into  
stillness,

The Life deep and silent, breaking out into roaring waves.

This idea of life is not a mere logical deduction ; it is as real to the poetess as the air to the bird who feels it at every beat of its wings. Woman has realized the mystery of life in her child more intimately than man has done. This woman's nature in the poet has felt the deep stir of life in all the world. She has known it to be infinite, not through any reasoning process, but through the illumination of her feeling. Therefore the same idea, which is a mere abstraction to one whose sense of the reality is limited, becomes luminously real to another whose sensibility has a wider range. We have often heard the Indian mind described by Western critics as metaphysical, because it is ready to soar in the infinite. But it has to be noted that the infinite is not a mere matter of philosophical speculation to India ; it is as real to her as the sunlight. She must see it, feel it, make use of it in her life. Therefore it has come out so profusely in her symbolism of worship, in her literature. The poet of the Upanishad has said that the slightest movement of life would be impossible if the sky were not filled with infinite joy. This universal presence was as much of a reality to him as the earth under his feet, nay, even more. The realization of this has broken out in a song of an Indian poet who was born in the fifteenth century :

There falls the rhythmic beat of life and death :

Rapture wells forth, and all space is radiant with light.

There the unstruck music is sounded ; it is the love  
music of three worlds.

There millions of lamps of sun and moon are burning ;

There the drum beats and the lover swings in play.

There love songs resound, and light rains in showers.



In India, the greater part of our literature is religious, because God with us is not a distant God ; He belongs to our homes as well as to our temples. We feel His nearness to us in all the human relationship of love and affection, and in our festivities He is the chief guest whom we honour. In seasons of flowers and fruits, in the coming of the rain, in the fulness of the autumn, we see the hem of His mantle and hear His footsteps. We worship Him in all the true objects of our worship and love Him wherever our love is true. In the woman who is good we feel Him, in the man who is true we know Him, in our children He is born again and again, the Eternal Child. Therefore, religious songs are our love songs, and our domestic occurrences, such as the birth of a son, or the coming of the daughter from her husband's house to her parents and her departure again, are woven in our literature as a drama whose counterpart is in the divine.

We have said before that where there is an element of the superfluous in our heart's relationship with the world, Art has its birth. In other words, where our personality feels its wealth it breaks out in display. What we devour for ourselves is totally spent. What overflows our need becomes articulate. The stage of pure utility is like the state of heat which is dark. When it surpasses itself, it becomes white heat and then it is expressive.

Take, for instance, our delight in eating. It is soon exhausted ; it gives no indication of the infinite. Therefore, though in its extensiveness it is more

universal than any other passion, it is rejected by art.

In our life we have one side which is finite, where we exhaust ourselves at every step, and we have another side, where our aspiration, enjoyment and sacrifice are infinite. This infinite side of man must have its revealments in some symbols which have the elements of immortality. There it naturally seeks perfection. Therefore it refuses all that is flimsy and feeble and incongruous. It builds for its dwelling a paradise, where only those materials are used that have transcended the earth's mortality.

For men are the children of light. Whenever they fully realize themselves they feel their immortality. And, as they feel it, they extend their realm of the immortal into every region of human life.

This building of man's true world—the living world of truth and beauty—is the function of Art.

Man is true where he feels his infinity, where he is divine, and the divine is the creator in him. Therefore with the attainment of his truth he creates. For he can truly live in his own creation and make out of God's world his own world. This is indeed his own heaven, the heaven of ideas shaped into perfect forms, with which he surrounds himself ; where his children are born, where they learn how to live and to die, how to love and to fight, where they know that the real is not that which is merely seen and wealth is not that which is stored. If man could only listen to the voice that rises from the

heart of his own creation, he would hear the same message that came from the Indian sage of the ancient time :

*'Hearken to me, ye children of the Immortal, dwellers of the heavenly worlds, I have known the Supreme Person who comes as light from the dark beyond.'*

Yes, it is that Supreme Person, who has made himself known to man and made this universe so deeply personal to him. Therefore, in India, our places of pilgrimage are there where, in the confluence of the river and the sea, in the eternal snow of the mountain peak, in the lonely seashore, some aspect of the infinite is revealed which has its great voice for our heart, and there man has left in his images and temples, in his carvings of stone, these words, 'Hearken to me, I have known the Supreme Person.' In the mere substance and law of this world we do not meet the person ; but where the sky is blue, and the grass is green, where the flower has its beauty and fruit its taste, where there is not only perpetuation of race, but joy of living and love of fellow creatures, sympathy and self-sacrifice, there is revealed to us the Person who is infinite. There, not merely are facts pelted down upon our heads, but we feel the bond of the personal relationship binding our hearts with this world through all time. And this is Reality, which is truth made our own—truth that has its eternal relation with the Supreme Person. This world, whose soul seems to be aching for expression in its endless rhythm of lines and colours, music and movements, hints

and whispers, and all the suggestion of the inexpressible, finds its harmony in the ceaseless longing of the human heart to make the Person manifest in its own creations.

The desire for the manifestations of this Person makes us lavish with all our resources. When we accumulate wealth, we have to account for every penny; we reason accurately and we act with care. But when we set about to express our wealthiness, we seem to lose sight of all lines of limit. In fact, none of us has wealth enough fully to express what we mean by wealthiness. When we try to save our life from an enemy's attack, we are cautious in our movements. But when we feel impelled to express our personal bravery, we willingly take risks and go to the length of losing our lives. We are careful of expenditure in our everyday life, but on festive occasions, when we express our joy, we are thriftless even to the extent of going beyond our means. For when we are intensely conscious of our own personality, we are apt to ignore the tyranny of facts. We are temperate in our dealings with the man with whom our relation is the relationship of prudence. But we feel we have not got enough for those whom we love. The poet says of the beloved :

*'It seems to me that I have gazed at your beauty from the beginning of my existence, that I have kept you in my arms for countless ages, yet it has not been enough for me.'*

He says, *'Stones would melt in tenderness, if touched by the breeze of your mantle.'*

He feels that his '*eyes long to fly like birds to see his beloved.*'

Judged from the standpoint of reason these are exaggerations, but from that of the heart, freed from limits of facts, they are true.

Is it not the same in God's creation? There, forces and matters are alike mere facts; they have their strict accounts kept and they can be accurately weighed and measured. Only beauty is not a mere fact; it cannot be accounted for, it cannot be surveyed and mapped. It is an expression. Facts are like wine-cups that carry it; they are hidden by it, it overflows them. It is infinite in its suggestions, it is extravagant in its words. It is personal, therefore, beyond science. It sings as does the poet: 'It seems to me that I have gazed at you from the beginning of my existence, that I have kept you in my arms for countless ages, yet it has not been enough for me.'

So we find that our world of expression does not accurately coincide with the world of facts, because personality surpasses facts on every side. It is conscious of its infinity and creates from its abundance; and because, in art, things are challenged from the standpoint of the immortal Person, those which are important in our customary life of facts become unreal when placed on the pedestal of art. A newspaper account of some domestic incident in the life of a commercial magnate may create agitation in Society, yet would lose all its significance if placed by the side of great works of art. We can well imagine how it would hide its face in shame,

if by some cruel accident it found itself in the neighbourhood of Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

Yet the very same incident, if treated deeply, divested of its conventional superficiality, might have a better claim in art than the negotiation for raising a big loan for China, or the defeat of British diplomacy in Turkey. A mere household event of a husband's jealousy of his wife, as depicted in one of Shakespeare's tragedies, has greater value in the realm of art than the code of caste regulations in Manu's scripture or the law prohibiting inhabitants of one part of the world from receiving human treatment in another. For when facts are looked upon as mere facts, having their chain of consequences in the world of facts, they are rejected by art.

When, however, such laws and regulations as I have mentioned are viewed in their application to some human individual, in all their injustice, insult and pain, then they are seen in their complete truth and they become subjects for art. The disposition of a great battle may be a great fact, but it is useless for the purpose of art. But what that battle has caused to a single individual soldier, separated from his loved ones and maimed for his life, has a vital value for art which deals with reality.

Man's social world is like some nebulous system of stars, consisting largely of a mist of abstractions, with such names as society, state, nation, commerce, politics and war. In their dense amorphousness man is hidden and truth is blurred. The one vague idea of war covers from our sight a

multitude of miseries, and obscures our sense of reality. The idea of the nation is responsible for crimes that would be appalling, if the mist could be removed for a moment. The idea of society has created forms of slavery without number, which we tolerate simply because it has deadened our consciousness of the reality of the personal man. In the name of religion deeds have been done that would exhaust all the resources of hell itself for punishment, because with its creeds and dogmas it has applied an extensive plaster of anaesthetic over a large surface of feeling humanity. Everywhere in man's world the Supreme Person is suffering from the killing of the human reality by the imposition of the abstract. In our schools the idea of the class hides the reality of the school children ; they become students and not individuals. Therefore it does not hurt us to see children's lives crushed, in their classes, like flowers pressed between book leaves. In government, the bureaucracy deals with generalizations and not with men. And therefore it costs it nothing to indulge in wholesale cruelties. Once we accept as truth such a scientific maxim as 'Survival of the Fittest' it immediately transforms the whole world of human personality into a monotonous desert of abstraction, where things become dreadfully simple because robbed of their mystery of life.

In these large tracts of nebulousness Art is creating its stars—stars that are definite in their forms but infinite in their personality. Art is calling us the 'children of the immortal,' and

proclaiming our right to dwell in the heavenly worlds.

What is it in man that asserts its immortality in spite of the obvious fact of death? It is not his physical body or his mental organization. It is that deeper unity, that ultimate mystery in him, which, from the centre of his world, radiates towards its circumference; which is in his body, yet transcends his body; which is in his mind, yet grows beyond his mind; which, through the things belonging to him, expresses something that is not in them; which, while occupying his present, overflows its banks of the past and the future. It is the personality of man, conscious of its inexhaustible abundance; it has the paradox in it that it is more than itself; it is more than as it is seen, as it is known, as it is used. And this consciousness of the infinite, in the personal man, ever strives to make its expressions immortal and to make the whole world its own. In Art the person in us is sending its answers to the Supreme Person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.



## NATIONALISM IN INDIA <sup>1</sup>

OUR real problem in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India but among all nations. I do not believe in an exclusive political interest. Politics in the West have dominated Western ideals, and we in India are trying to imitate you. We have to remember that in Europe, where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning, and where natural resources were insufficient for the inhabitants, the civilization has naturally taken the character of political and commercial aggressiveness. For on the one hand they had no internal complications, and on the other they had to deal with neighbours who were strong and rapacious. To have perfect combination among themselves and a watchful attitude of animosity against others was taken as the solution of their problems. In former days they organized and plundered; in the present age the same spirit continues, and they organize and exploit the whole world.

But from the earliest beginnings of history, India has had her own problem constantly before her—it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious

<sup>1</sup> A speech delivered in America, published in 'Nationalism.'

of its mission, and we, in India, must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence.

In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints, like Nanak,<sup>1</sup> Kabir,<sup>2</sup> Chaitnaya<sup>3</sup> and others, preaching one God to all races of India.

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history—the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause.

Each individual has his self-love. Therefore his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The people who are lacking in this higher moral power, and who therefore cannot combine in fellowship with one another, must perish or live in a state of degradation. Only those peoples have survived and achieved civilization who have this spirit of

<sup>1</sup> The founder of the Sikh religion, a mystic and a poet, *b.* 1469, *d.* 1538.

<sup>2</sup> A Hindu reformer of mediaeval India, *b.* 1440, *d.* 1518.

<sup>3</sup> A modern Hindu Vaishnava reformer, who died in Bengal, *b.* 1485, *d.* 1527; it was a main part of his doctrine to abolish all caste distinctions among his followers.

co-operation strong in them. So we find that from the beginning of history men had to choose between fighting with one another and combining, between serving their own interest or the common interest of all.

In our early history, when the geographical limits of each country and also the facilities of communication were small, this problem was comparatively small in dimension. It was sufficient for men to develop their sense of unity within their area of segregation. In those days they combined among themselves and fought against others. But it was this moral spirit of combination which was the true basis of their greatness, and this fostered their art, science and religion. At that early time the most important fact that man had to take count of was the fact of the members of one particular race of men coming in close contact with one another. Those who truly grasped this fact through their higher nature made their mark in history.

The most important fact of the present age is that all the different races of men have come close together. And again we are confronted with two alternatives. The problem is whether the different groups of peoples shall go on fighting with one another or find out some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help ; whether it will be interminable competition or co-operation.

I have no hesitation in saying that those who are gifted with the moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity, who have the least feeling of enmity against aliens, and the sympathetic insight to place

themselves in the position of others, will be the fittest to take their permanent place in the age that is lying before us, and those who are constantly developing their instinct of fight and intolerance of aliens will be eliminated. For this is the problem before us, and we have to prove our humanity by solving it through the help of our higher nature. The gigantic organizations for hurting others and warding off their blows, for making money by dragging others back, will not help us. On the contrary, by their crushing weight, their enormous cost and their deadening effect upon living humanity, they will seriously impede our freedom in the larger life of a higher civilization.

During the evolution of the Nation the moral culture of brotherhood was limited by geographical boundaries, because at that time those boundaries were true. Now they have become imaginary lines of tradition divested of the qualities of real obstacles. So the time has come when man's moral nature must deal with this great fact with all seriousness or perish. The first impulse of this change of circumstance has been the churning up of man's baser passions of greed and cruel hatred. If this persists indefinitely, and armaments go on exaggerating themselves to unimaginable absurdities, and machines and storehouses envelop this fair earth with their dirt and smoke and ugliness, then it will end in a conflagration of suicide. Therefore man will have to exert all his power of love and clarity of vision to make another great moral adjustment which will comprehend the whole world of men

and not merely the fractional groups of nationality. The call has come to every individual in the present age to prepare himself and his surroundings for this dawn of a new era, when man shall discover his soul in the spiritual unity of all human beings.

In my country we have been seeking to find out something common to all races which will prove their real unity. No nation looking for a mere political or commercial basis of unity will find such a solution sufficient. Men of thought and power will discover the spiritual unity, will realize it, and preach it.

India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.

The educated Indian at present is trying to absorb some lessons from history contrary to the lessons of our ancestors. The East, in fact, is attempting to take unto itself a history which is not the outcome of its own living. Japan, for example, thinks she is getting powerful through adopting Western methods, but, after she has exhausted her inheritance, only the borrowed weapons of civilization will remain to her. She will not have developed herself from within.

Europe has her past. Europe's strength therefore lies in her history. We, in India, must make up

our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life.

And therefore I believe that it does India no good to compete with Western civilization in its own field. But we shall be more than compensated if, in spite of the insults heaped upon us, we follow our own destiny.

We must know for certain that there is a future before us and that future is waiting for those who are rich in moral ideals and not in mere things. And it is the privilege of man to work for fruits that are beyond his immediate reach, and to adjust his life, not in slavish conformity to the examples of some present success or even to his own prudent past, limited in its aspiration, but to an indefinite future bearing in its heart the ideals of our highest expectations.

We must recognize that it is providential that the West has come to India. And yet some one must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilization. India is no beggar of the West. And yet even though the West may think she is, I am not for thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association. If Providence wants England to be the channel of that communication, of that deeper association, I am willing to accept it with all humility. I have great faith

in human nature, and I think the West will find its true mission. I speak bitterly of Western civilization when I am conscious that it is betraying its trust and thwarting its own purpose. The West must not make herself a curse to the world by using her power for her own selfish needs, but, by teaching the ignorant and helping the weak, she should save herself from the worst danger that the strong is liable to incur by making the feeble acquire power enough to resist her intrusion. And also she must not make her materialism to be the final thing, but must realize that she is doing a service in freeing the spiritual being from the tyranny of matter.

I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations. What is the Nation ?

It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical. Yet in this he feels all the satisfaction of moral exaltation and therefore becomes supremely dangerous to humanity. He feels relieved of the urging of his conscience when he can transfer his responsibility to this machine which is the creation of his intellect and not of his complete moral personality. By this device the people which loves

freedom perpetuates slavery in a large portion of the world with the comfortable feeling of pride of having done its duty ; men who are naturally just can be cruelly unjust both in their act and their thought, accompanied by a feeling that they are helping the world to receive its deserts ; men who are honest can blindly go on robbing others of their human rights for self-aggrandizement, all the while abusing the deprived for not deserving better treatment. We have seen in our everyday life even small organizations of business and profession produce callousness of feeling in men who are not naturally bad, and we can well imagine what a moral havoc it is causing in a world where whole peoples are furiously organizing themselves for gaining wealth and power.

Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude, we have tried to develop within ourselves, despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual political destiny.

It was my conviction that what India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself. In this work we must take all risks and go on doing the duties which by right are ours, though in the teeth of persecution ; winning moral victory at every step, by our failure and suffering. We must show those who are over us that we have in ourselves the strength of moral power, the power to suffer for



truth. Where we have nothing to show, we have only to beg. It would be mischievous if the gifts we wish for were granted to us at once, and I have told my countrymen, time and again, to combine for the work of creating opportunities to give vent to our spirit of self-sacrifice, and not for the purpose of begging.

Once again I draw your attention to the difficulties India has had to encounter and her struggle to overcome them. Her problem was the problem of the world in miniature. India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely, one country made into many. Thus Europe in its culture and growth has had the advantage of the strength of the many as well as the strength of the one. India, on the contrary, being naturally many, yet adventitiously one, has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity. A true unity is like a round globe, it rolls on, carrying its burden easily ; but diversity is a many-cornered thing which has to be dragged and pushed with all force. Be it said to the credit of India that this diversity was not her own creation ; she has had to accept it as a fact from the beginning of her history. In America and Australia, Europe has simplified her problem by almost exterminating the original population. Even in the present age this spirit of extermination is making itself manifest, in the inhospitable shutting out of aliens, by those who themselves were aliens in the lands they now

occupy. But India tolerated difference of races from the first, and that spirit of toleration has acted all through her history.

Her caste system is the outcome of this spirit of toleration. For India has all along been trying experiments in evolving a social unity within which all the different peoples could be held together, while fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. The tie has been as loose as possible, yet as close as the circumstances permitted. This has produced something like a United States of a social federation, whose common name is Hinduism.

India had felt that diversity of races there must be and should be, whatever may be its drawback, and you can never coerce nature into your narrow limits of convenience without paying one day very dearly for it. In this India was right ; but what she failed to realize was that in human beings differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed for ever—they are fluid with life's flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume.

Therefore in her caste regulations India recognized differences, but not the mutability which is the law of life. In trying to avoid collisions she set up boundaries of immovable walls, thus giving to her numerous races the negative benefit of peace and order but not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement. She accepted nature where it produces diversity, but ignored it where it uses that diversity for its world-game of infinite permuta-

tions and combinations. She treated life in all truth where it is manifold, but insulted it where it is ever moving. Therefore Life departed from her social system and in its place she is worshipping with all ceremony the magnificent cage of countless compartments that she has manufactured.

The same thing happened where she tried to ward off the collisions of trade interests. She associated different trades and professions with different castes. This had the effect of allaying for good the interminable jealousy and hatred of competition—the competition which breeds cruelty and makes the atmosphere thick with lies and deception. In this also India laid all her emphasis upon the law of heredity, ignoring the law of mutation, and thus gradually reduced arts into crafts and genius into skill.

However, what Western observers fail to discern is that in her caste system India in all seriousness accepted her responsibility to solve the race problem in such a manner as to avoid all friction, and yet to afford each race freedom within its boundaries. Let us admit India has not in this achieved a full measure of success. But this you must also concede, that the West, being more favourably situated as to homogeneity of races, has never given her attention to this problem, and whenever confronted with it she has tried to make it easy by ignoring it altogether. And this is the source of her anti-Asiatic agitations for depriving aliens of their right to earn their honest living on her shores. Either she shuts her doors against the aliens or reduces them into slavery.

And this is her solution of the problem of race-conflict. Whatever may be its merits, it will have to be admitted that it does not spring from the higher impulses of civilization, but from the lower passions of greed and hatred. It will be said this is human nature—and India also thought she knew human nature when she strongly barricaded her race distinctions by the fixed barriers of social gradations. But we have found out to our cost that human nature is not what it seems, but what it is in truth; which is in its infinite possibilities. And when we in our blindness insult humanity for its ragged appearance it sheds its disguise to disclose to us that we have insulted our God. The degradation which we cast upon others in our pride or self-interest degrades our own humanity—and this is the punishment which is most terrible, because we do not detect it till it is too late.

Not only in her relation with aliens but with the different sections of her own society the West has not achieved harmony of reconciliation. The spirit of conflict and competition is allowed the full freedom of its reckless career. And because its genesis is the greed of wealth and power it can never come to any other end but to a violent death. In India the production of commodities was brought under the law of social adjustments. Its basis was co-operation, having for its object the perfect satisfaction of social needs. But in the West it is guided by the impulse of competition, whose end is the gain of wealth for individuals. But the individual is like the geometrical line—it is length

without breadth. It has not got the depth to be able to hold anything permanently. Therefore its greed or gain can never come to finality. In its lengthening process of growth it can cross other lines and cause entanglements, but will ever go on missing the ideal of completeness in its thinness of isolation.

In all our physical appetites we recognize a limit. We know that to exceed that limit is to exceed the limit of health. But has lust for wealth and power no bounds beyond which is death's dominion? In these national carnivals of materialism, are not the Western peoples spending most of their vital energy in merely producing things and neglecting the creation of ideals? And can a civilization ignore the law of moral health and go on in its endless process of inflation by gorging upon material things? Man in his social ideals naturally tries to regulate his appetites, subordinating them to the higher purpose of his nature. But in the economic world our appetites follow no other restrictions but those of supply and demand which can be artificially fostered, affording individuals opportunities for indulgence in an endless feast of grossness. In India our social instincts imposed restrictions upon our appetites—maybe it went to the extreme of repression—but in the West the spirit of economic organization with no moral purpose goads the people into the perpetual pursuit of wealth. But has this no wholesome limit?

The ideals that strive to take form in social institutions have two objects. One is to regulate our passions and appetites for the harmonious

development of man, and the other is to help him to cultivate disinterested love for his fellow creatures. Therefore society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature.

Our food is creative, it builds our body ; but not so wine, which stimulates. Our social ideals create the human world, but when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power, then in that state of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality where our strength is not health and our liberty is not freedom. Therefore political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free. An automobile does not create freedom of movement, because it is a mere machine. When I myself am free I can use the automobile for the purpose of my freedom.

We must never forget in the present day that those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom. Those who have made the gain of money their highest end are unconsciously selling their life and soul to rich persons or to the combinations that represent money. Those who are enamoured of their political power and gloat over their extension of dominion over foreign races gradually surrender their own freedom and humanity to the organizations necessary for holding other peoples in slavery. In the so-called free countries the majority of the people are not free, they are driven by the minority

to a goal which is not even known to them. This becomes possible only because people do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object. They create huge eddies with their passions, and they feel dizzily inebriated with the mere velocity of their whirling movement, taking that to be freedom. But the doom which is waiting to overtake them is as certain as death—for man's truth is moral truth and his emancipation is in the spiritual life.

The general opinion of the majority of the present-day nationalists in India is that we have come to a final completeness in our social and spiritual ideals, the task of the constructive work of society having been done several thousand years before we were born, and that now we are free to employ all our activities in the political direction. We never dream of blaming our social inadequacy as the origin of our present helplessness, for we have accepted as the creed of our nationalism that this social system has been perfected for all time to come by our ancestors, who had the superhuman vision of all eternity and supernatural power for making infinite provision for future ages. Therefore, for all our miseries and shortcomings, we hold responsible the historical surprises that burst upon us from outside. This is the reason why we think that our task is to build a political miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery. In fact we want to dam up the true course of our own historical stream, and only borrow power from the sources of other peoples' history.

Those of us in India who have come under the delusion that mere political freedom will make us free have accepted their lessons from the West as the gospel truth and lost their faith in humanity. We must remember whatever weakness we cherish in our society will become the source of danger in politics. The same inertia which leads us to our idolatry of dead forms in social institutions will create in our politics prison-houses with immovable walls. The narrowness of sympathy which makes it possible for us to impose upon a considerable portion of humanity the galling yoke of inferiority will assert itself in our politics in creating the tyranny of injustice.

When our nationalists talk about ideals they forget that the basis of nationalism is wanting. The very people who are upholding these ideals are themselves the most conservative in their social practice. Nationalists say, for example, look at Switzerland, where, in spite of race differences, the peoples have solidified into a nation. Yet, remember that in Switzerland the races can mingle, they can intermarry, because they are of the same blood. In India there is no common birthright. And when we talk of Western Nationality we forget that the nations there do not have that physical repulsion, one for the other, that we have between different castes. Have we an instance in the whole world where a people who are not allowed to mingle their blood shed their blood for one another except by coercion or for mercenary purposes? And can we ever hope that these moral barriers against our race amal-



gamation will not stand in the way of our political unity ?

Then again, we must give full recognition to this fact that our social restrictions are still tyrannical, so much so as to make men cowards. If a man tells me he has heterodox ideas, but that he cannot follow them because he would be socially ostracized, I excuse him for having to live a life of untruth, in order to live at all. The social habit of mind which impels us to make the life of our fellow-beings a burden to them where they differ from us even in such a thing as their choice of food, is sure to persist in our political organization and result in creating engines of coercion to crush every rational difference which is the sign of life. And tyranny will only add to the inevitable lies and hypocrisy in our political life. Is the mere name of freedom so valuable that we should be willing to sacrifice for its sake our moral freedom ?

The intemperance of our habits does not immediately show its effects when we are in the vigour of our youth. But it gradually consumes that vigour, and when the period of decline sets in then we have to settle accounts and pay off our debts, which leads us to insolvency. In the West you are still able to carry your head high, though your humanity is suffering every moment from its dipsomania of organizing power. India also in the heyday of her youth could carry in her vital organs the dead weight of her social organizations stiffened to rigid perfection, but it has been fatal to her, and has produced a gradual paralysis of her living nature.

And this is the reason why the educated community of India has become insensible of her social needs. They are taking the very immobility of our social structures as the sign of their perfection, and because the healthy feeling of pain is dead in the limbs of our social organism they delude themselves into thinking that it needs no ministration. Therefore they think that all their energies need their only scope in the political field. It is like a man whose legs have become shrivelled and useless, trying to delude himself that these limbs have grown still because they have attained their ultimate salvation, and all that is wrong about him is the shortness of his sticks.

So much for the social and the political regeneration of India. Now we come to her industries, and I am very often asked whether there is in India any industrial regeneration since the advent of the British Government. It must be remembered that at the beginning of the British rule in India our industries were suppressed, and since then we have not met with any real help or encouragement to enable us to make a stand against the monster commercial organizations of the world. The nations have decreed that we must remain purely an agricultural people, even forgetting the use of arms for all time to come. Thus India is being turned into so many predigested morsels of food ready to be swallowed at any moment by any nation which has even the most rudimentary set of teeth in its head.

India therefore has very little outlet for her industrial originality. I personally do not believe

in the unwieldy organizations of the present day. The very fact that they are ugly shows that they are in discordance with the whole creation. The vast powers of nature do not reveal their truth in hideousness, but in beauty. Beauty is the signature which the Creator stamps upon His works when He is satisfied with them. All our products that insolently ignore the laws of perfection and are unashamed in their display of ungainliness bear the perpetual weight of God's displeasure. So far as your commerce lacks the dignity of grace it is untrue. Beauty and her twin brother Truth require leisure and self-control for their growth. But the greed of gain has no time or limit to its capaciousness. Its one object is to produce and consume. It has pity neither for beautiful nature nor for living human beings. It is ruthlessly ready without a moment's hesitation to crush beauty and life out of them, moulding them into money. It is this ugly vulgarity of commerce which brought upon it the censure of contempt in our earlier days, when men had leisure to have an unclouded vision of perfection in humanity. Men in those times were rightly ashamed of the instinct of mere money-making. But in this scientific age money, by its very abnormal bulk, has won its throne. And when from its eminence of piled-up things it insults the higher instincts of man, banishing beauty and noble sentiments from its surroundings, we submit. For we in our meanness have accepted bribes from its hands and our imagination has grovelled in the dust before its immensity of flesh.

But its very unwieldiness and its endless complexities are its true signs of failure. The swimmer who is an expert does not exhibit his muscular force by violent movements, but exhibits some power which is invisible and which shows itself in perfect grace and reposefulness. The true distinction of man from animals is in his power and worth, which are inner and invisible. But the present-day commercial civilization of man is not only taking too much time and space but killing time and space. Its movements are violent, its noise is discordantly loud. It is carrying its own damnation because it is trampling into distortion the humanity upon which it stands. It is strenuously turning out money at the cost of happiness. Man is reducing himself to his minimum in order to be able to make amplest room for his organizations. He is deriding his human sentiments into shame because they are apt to stand in the way of his machines.

In our mythology we have the legend that the man who performs penances for attaining immortality has to meet with temptations sent by Indra, the lord of the immortals. If he is lured by them he is lost. The West has been striving for centuries after its goal of immortality. Indra has sent her the temptation to try her. It is the gorgeous temptation of wealth. She has accepted it, and her civilization of humanity has lost its path in the wilderness of machinery.

The temptation which is fatal for the strong is still more so for the weak. And I do not welcome it in our Indian life, even though it be sent by the

lord of the immortals. Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social co-operation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of our life-blood by the economic dragons is the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul. It is a sign of laziness and impotency to accept conditions imposed upon us by others who have other ideals than ours. We should actively try to adapt the world powers to guide our history to its own perfect end.

From the above you will know that I am not an economist. I am willing to acknowledge that there is a law of demand and supply and an infatuation of man for more things than are good for him. And yet I will persist in believing that there is such a thing as the harmony of completeness in humanity, where poverty does not take away his riches, where defeat may lead him to victory, death to immortality, and where in the compensation of Eternal Justice those who are the last may yet have their insult transmuted into a golden triumph.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS <sup>1</sup>

WHEN I was about to start for my tour in China and Japan there was an enthusiastic meeting in Calcutta, where my countrymen came together to express their joy at my taking this journey to the great Eastern countries. I felt with a sense of delight that the consciousness of kinship was waxing stronger among our people and that its growth might lead to a great future for Asia.

My friends who came to wish me happy times on these shores, asked me also to convey to your country their feelings of love and respect for you. They also requested me to ask you to rise above circumstances, favourable or unfavourable, and to prove the dignity of Eastern mind. They are all waiting to see a great Renaissance in Asia through Japan, where life is at its floodtide, and they wish she would wake up to the great responsibility she has, not only to her own people, but to the great continent to which she belongs.

At the same time, they wanted me to offer to your people their heartfelt sympathy for the disaster<sup>2</sup> which has so suddenly overtaken your country. I am sure that the calamities over which you have

<sup>1</sup> *A lecture delivered in Japan.*    <sup>2</sup> The great earthquake of 1923.

no hand came to prove your manhood, and are in themselves an opportunity. Disasters only become absolutely disastrous when we know not how to deal with them.

Now that I have come to Japan, I realize with what courage you have accepted your tribulation. I see no sign of despair in your faces ; I see that you have within yourselves that indomitable resourcefulness which will help you to make good the loss. I do not mean that they will merely make your position stronger even than before ; but the fact that you are able to face misfortune of such an overwhelming nature in the right spirit will gain for you greater prestige among other nations, and give you a firmer confidence in your own power.

All great civilizations are built upon numberless ruins—the toppled-down towers of victory and wealth. It is only human beings in this world of life who have found their greatness through the desperate urgings of unfavourable circumstances. Humanity has never been pampered, petted and spoilt by Nature, but rather respected by being given constant opportunity to overcome the obstacles of failures and losses. I believe that what has now happened to you, and has brought your gathered resources of years to the dust in a moment, will inspire you to make a better beginning for a more vigorous experiment. You will realize that the people's life, like a waterfall, finds its full force of movement through courageous leaps from peak to peak of new trials.

This earthquake has only been the cause of

physical upset for you, but unfortunately, closely following this, you have also received lately a rude moral shock in your national relations with another people, and this has deeply hurt your people, even more than the former which was only physical, because it has come with deliberate purpose from human hands. And yet what I expect to see among your people at this time of crisis is the same dignity of calm and patient fortitude.

You are on your trial to-day. The eyes of all nations are upon you in this calamity. Great tribulations in our history should never fail to give us the occasion to bring out the best resources of our life, so as not only to reveal them to the outer world, but—and this is more valuable—to reveal them to ourselves. If to-day you can discover some hidden source of magnanimity with which to face the insult and injury, if you can keep the majesty of your mind unimpaired, then you will be happy, and future generations will be thankful to you.

You have discovered one thing, that this earthquake, though but physical, and therefore causing you only material loss, has yet a great similarity to the disturbance of your relations with a Western country;<sup>1</sup> for, the latter is also external, having in it no acknowledgment of moral law. Any relationship which had a moral value would have been stronger than before at this time of suffering. But your relationship, as it was, was precarious.

<sup>1</sup> America : the reference is to the anti-Japanese emigration laws of the United States.



Any little event would have proved its hollowness. This was inevitable because it was not based upon the comradeship of human hearts. It had for its basis a sense of mere expediency, that lacked the frankness of youth and had the calculating spirit of senility. It was a treacherously shifting base upon which you could never have built your best hopes.

It is unfortunate that such disillusionment always gives rise to our baser passions. We feel angry and vengeful and eager to retaliate. Only then it becomes a complete defeat. Is it right that you, along with your political defeat, should accept moral defeat? I hope that your people, through your spiritual generosity, through your true pride of civilization and through that sense of hospitality which has been your birthright for centuries, will exercise your mind that has been trained and gifted with a wonderful self-control.

I should deplore very deeply the appearance of any sign of decay in these great traits of character that you possess. This is the time when you can bring out of your store all the wealth of moral heroism that you have inherited from your forefathers. This is the time to put to shame those others who have treated you in this unchivalrous manner, showing that their profession of friendship was all the while waiting for your weak moment, shamelessly to contradict itself. I do not think that any symptom of political hysteria on your part is at all seemly at this time, or in accordance with your national tradition.

If we find you indulging just now in vulgar

boisterousness, we shall know that it is weakness, which you have borrowed through those importers of moral drugs from abroad. We have been schooled in the West, where they have become hypnotized by the sight of open and public expressions of vengefulness, the modern version of the naked war-dance of the savage. I hope that you will be saved from this. Real suicide it would be, if you were to forget your own true character and the fact that there is a kind of death far worse than physical death itself.

In the East, we have had the courage to have faith even in impossible ideals. You all know that it was a prophet of the East who could say, 'Love your enemies.' You know, too, of another prophet of the East who could say, 'Conquer anger by non-anger and evil by goodness.' There are those in the West who have accepted these teachings in their churches and yet who feel extremely nervous when they are reminded of them, when they find that such teaching is commercially unprofitable and politically inconvenient. Some of our friends here, who have studied Indian history, will tell you how these ideals have been pursued and believed in, and how men went to extreme lengths of non-killing, of non-violence, and of non-anger.

You have perhaps also learnt from the newspapers how a prophet<sup>1</sup> has arisen in India, who has likewise proclaimed that you have to conquer violence by non-violence. He speaks like a prophet of the East and insists that what has been translated into the

<sup>1</sup> Mahatma Gandhi.

Bible of the West must not only be pursued in the personal lives of individuals but must be given the best possible expression in our national lives.

Perhaps most of you will not accept this teaching—you will not be able to apply it to your national life. I understand your misgivings and sympathize with you in your want of faith. But let us discuss this point.

There was a time when our lives were simpler, ✓ when the spirit of the people was hospitable. This spirit has been overcome by the spirit of the Nation, with its intense consciousness of self-interest concentrated in political organization. Such an unlimited cultivation of over-consciousness of self by the whole people must inevitably produce its harvest of suspicion, hatred and inhospitable exclusiveness. And, therefore, if you have been rudely treated by a nation, and abruptly hustled out whenever it has been safe for it to disclose its moral crudity, there is no cause for surprise. It is of no use to be angry either against the earthquake, or against such eruptions of moral catastrophe, which are inevitable when this phenomenon that we term the Nation is rampant.

To be just and fair, you have to acknowledge that you also have been unjust and grasping where your nation has had a safe opportunity to manifest its evil aspect. I have a deep love and respect for you as a people, but when as a nation you have your dealings with other nations you also can be deceptive, cruel and efficient in handling those methods in which the Western nations show such mastery.

You must not plume yourselves that when you are suffering from smallpox your skin and temperature behave better than those of other people who have the same malady.

Let us consider how this demoniacal power of the Nation has arisen. The nature of the people depends for its manifestation upon its creative personality. It has religion, arts, literature, traditions of social responsibility and co-operation. Its wealth to maintain itself and power of defence are secondary ; they are not the ultimate ends for the people. But the Nation manifests itself in its property. The people represent life, the nation materials ; when they are in harmony, that is to say, when material possessions keep to their own limits and the creative life is unhampered in its spontaneous activity, then civilization is hospitable and generous. This being the case in the olden times it was possible for India to find her home in the heart of China and Japan, and your administrators did not busy themselves to find out if some groups of idealists, freed from barriers of passport offices, were finding access to the heart of your country, instead of into its gaols with police spies at their heels.

But when material possessions become too vast for a people, or when in competition with others the desire for material wealth rouses its ambition, then all its time and mind are occupied with very little else. The man who is a 'millionaire' is dragged by the very weight of his millions to the path of the multitude of millions. Then he has no time for

culture, or for the poetry of life ; he strictly barricades himself against visitors, whom he cannot but suspect to be self-seekers, being selfish in his own outlook upon life. In other words he becomes professional, and the human in him is banished into the shade.

Since Nature's storehouse of power and wealth has been opened by the help of science, some people who know how to take advantage of it have suddenly grown enormously rich and others are incited to follow their example. The people who were once human, who were creative and social in their self-expression, have become professional, enormously self-centred and anti-social in their tendency of mind. Material wealth and power, with their very bulk, have occupied the greater part of the space, time and mind of the people, necessitating a tremendous expense of thought and resources for ensuring their safety.

Material possessions create the worst divisions in human society when they are disproportionately big and naturally unmindful of moral responsibility. Therefore the Nation, the presiding genius of the material department of the people, cannot but be hard and exclusive. And in the modern age this department has become the most proudly domineering of all other manifestations of human society. It has made the craving for money universal and has given the name of Progress to the raising of the material standard of living. ✓

We all know how those who are immoderately rich suffer from a sense of class distinction ; how

money, which is a dead thing, acts as an impenetrable wall around their self-imprisonment. Within this dungeon of illusion they are proud of their segregation. This process is going on not only with individuals, but with the prosperous nations. And it is just these prosperous nations which become most suspicious of idealism, which barricade their doors with spies, police and prohibitions in order to safeguard their citadel of wealth, where the human spirit languishes and where there is no touch of life.

Such nations are doomed and they carry the curse of God in their money-bags. They will die in the very enclosures which they have built for themselves—enclosures of wealth, of high walls of national distinction impenetrable for others. Yet these are the people who once professed faith in a man, and even accepted him to be their God, who said it was easier for a camel to pass through the needle's eye than for the rich to find access to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is here on this earth. It is there, where we realize our best relations with our fellow-beings, where there is no mutual suspicion and misunderstanding—there is the Kingdom of Heaven, in the spirit of comradeship and love. Christ was right when He said that the path to such a Kingdom is closed for him who thinks more of his money than of his soul, more of his soul, more of his personal right than of his human responsibility. Now that the whole human world has surrendered itself to the lure of money and power, the severance of human relationship is everywhere becoming

evident and the fight between classes is spreading wide.

If you must have peace you will have to fight the spirit of this demon, the Nation. You may think it hopeless, but do you not realize that its first appearance was not so long ago, not more than two centuries ; that it has not the sign of immortality upon it, that already it is tottering towards its downfall ? You must know that if we cling to this sinking ship we also shall be drowned.

Let me appeal to your imagination. If we could go back into the distant past, we would know of facts that are not in histories. We would know that groups of men grew into great peoples through overcoming a feeling of distrust and cultivating sympathy for each other. It was not at all easy ; for our passions are individualistic, our selfishness immensely strong. And yet the impossible has been attained in some societies. A system of discipline has been established, the sentiments of sympathy cultivated, and the ferocious savage has been tamed on a wholesale scale. We must also know that those who went on indulging in their selfish isolation perished.

Suppose that the idealists had been there in those days, and that they had had the courage to speak to those who still believed in robbery and muscular brutality and to warn them that they would never form great nations, do you think that they would have been listened to ? They would promptly have been eaten up !

In the early history of life in this world, with

its display of stupendous bodily bulk and strength, when puny man first appeared on this earth, could his final victory have been predicated by the logic of appearances? In the same manner, it is apparently unbelievable to-day that only those who can overcome the egoistic sense of nationalism, who can develop the understanding of sympathy that pierces through barriers of race differences, who have the enduring strength of meekness, will inherit the earth; and not those who are imagined to be born rulers of men.

Often have my Western friends almost sneeringly said to me that we in the East have no faith in Democracy, and thereupon they have asserted the superiority of their own mind over ours. Not being combative, I did not want to argue the matter and contradict them in their deep-rooted illusion. I know that in our part of the world we have some people who, as being of noble descent, are considered aristocrats, and enjoy special rights. My Western friends believe that they have no such anomalies in their part of the world.

Be that as it may, one thing they must admit, that because our aristocracy is restricted to a narrow circle, the rest of the people have the true democratic spirit, which is the spirit of the community. About one thing there can be no difference of opinion, that we never had an aristocracy of the whole people, like this monstrous aristocracy so proud of its European blood, which has no pity for others who are darker in colour, for those Asiatics and Africans who can be exploited with impunity, as the common people



used to be exploited in France before the revolution broke out.

These monster aristocrats consider us to be plebeian because we are of another continent. While loudly protesting their democracy, they extort false evidence from a make-believe science to prove their race superiority and their right to inherit the earth. These aristocrats of monstrous girth and open jaws are out to feast upon the life-blood of peoples whom they have dubbed ignoble, who are expected to feel grateful for providing comfort to the Nordic race with their own extinction. They assert their race aristocracy, not merely through their home-made science, but through the coercion of darker continents to slavery by the shattering argument of bombs. To-day, they are almost openly ready to drop their pretensions to moral culture ; but nevertheless they cling to their two illusions, the one of the Nordic race, and the other of Democracy.

We, who do not profess democracy, acknowledge our human obligations and have faith in our code of honour. But are you also going to allow yourselves to be tempted by the contagion of this belief in your own hungry right of inborn superiority, bearing the false name of democracy? Leave the unreality of these professions ; hold up to us something which is your very own and not mere imitation. Do you not see how this malady of imitation is rapidly spreading from shore to shore, from nation to nation ? It has the same monotony of features, in its offices, barracks, dress and manners, its attitude of mind.

Every people in this world is vying with its neighbour to copy it, because being non-living it is easy to copy indefinitely. It is a mask that can be precisely similar in its multiplication, not a face which has spontaneous variety of self-expression.

But the mask can easily smother the living individuality of the face. That is what is happening everywhere in the world—the monotony of the nation killing the individuality of the people. The stone pavement, which can be made in the same stereotyped plan everywhere, deprives the soil of its unique personality of flowers and harvest. Through this deadening influence even your arts and crafts, all the delicate idioms of expression in your life and surroundings, are fast losing their own living character and stiffening into the standardized convention made in a foreign world. The Nation makes this mould, which may be useful ; but we cannot afford to pay its cost with the inspiration of creative life, which is inherent in living peoples.

It is the people in the Western countries that have produced its literature, its art, its music and dance ; it is the spirit of the people that spoke through the voice of the great dramatists and artists of Greece, through the voice of Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe ; it is the soul of your people which reigns in your homes, giving them a profound quiet of beauty, in the dignified self-control of your behaviour, in the combination of usefulness and grace in all things that you produce, in your inimitable paintings and dramatic performances.

But what are these products of the Nation—the machinery of destruction and profit-making, the double-dealings of diplomacy—in the face of which moral obligation lies defeated and the spirit of human brotherhood destroyed? You have been tempted, or perhaps almost compelled, to accept them; and we in India are envying you, ready for ourselves to accept as much of them as comes our way. The cruelty and meanness of lies and exaggeration and the greed of self-seeking are creeping up over that soil on which were born those great sages who preached *maitri*<sup>1</sup> and self-emancipation.

Whenever the spirit of the Nation has come it has destroyed sympathy and beauty, and driven out the generous obligations of human relationship from the hearts of men. It has spread the ugliness of its cities and its markets into the minds and enthroned the demon of deformity in the hearts of men. Though to-day it dominates the spirit of man everywhere in the world, it will die like the worm which lies in the heart of the fruit that it has devoured. It will die; but unfortunately it may meanwhile destroy things of unrivalled worth, the products of centuries of self-control and spiritual training. ✓

I have come to warn you in Japan—the country where I wrote my first lectures against Nationalism at a time when people laughed my ideas to scorn. They thought that I did not know the meaning of the word, and accused me of having confused the word Nation with State. But I stuck to my con-

<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit for friendship.

viction, and now after the war, do you not hear everywhere the denunciation of this spirit of the Nation, this collective egoism of the people, which is universally hardening their hearts?

I have come once again to remind you. I hope to be able to meet individuals in this country who have the courage of faith needed to bring about a great future. Let Japan find her own true mind, which will not merely accept lessons from others, but will create a world of her own, which will be generous of its gifts to all humanity. Make all other peoples of Asia proud in their acknowledgment of your greatness, which is not based upon the enslavement of victims, upon the accumulation of material wealth exclusively for your own enjoyment—wealth which is not accepted by man for all time and is rejected by God.

## THE VOICE OF HUMANITY<sup>1</sup>

MY friends, I have been waiting for this moment. When Prof. Formichi asked me to tell him what would be my subject this evening, I said I did not know ; for you must understand that I am not a speaker. I am nothing better than a poet. When I speak, I speak *with* my surroundings and not *to* my surroundings. Now that I see your kind faces, your silent voice has reached my heart, and my voice will blend with it. When the heart wishes to pay its debt, it must have some coin with the stamp of its own realm upon it—and that is our mother tongue. But I do not know your beautiful language, neither do you know mine. Since, therefore, that medium cannot be used for the commerce of thought and sentiment between you and myself, I have reluctantly to use the English language, which is neither yours nor mine. Therefore at the outset I ask you to forgive me—those of you who do not know this language, as also those of you who do—because my English is a foreigner's English.

Now I know what I am going to speak to you about. It will be in answer to the question as to what was the urging that brought me to you across

<sup>1</sup> *An address given at Milan.*

the sea. Some time in 1921 I felt a great desire to make my pilgrimage to the shrine of humanity, where the human mind was fully awake, with all its lamps lighted, there to meet face to face the Eternal in man. It had occurred to me that this present age was dominated by the European mind only because that mind was fully awake. You all know how the spirit of great Asia is going through an age-long slumber in the depth of night, with only few lonely watchers to read the stars and wait for the sign of the rising sun across the darkness. So I had this longing to come to Europe and see the human spirit in the full blaze of its power and beauty. Then it was that I took that voyage—my voyage of pilgrimage to Europe—leaving for the moment my own work at Shanti-Niketan and the children I loved.

✓ But this was not my first visit to Europe. In the year 1878, when I was a boy, barely seventeen, I was brought over by my brother to these shores. It will be difficult for you to realize what visions we had in the East, in those days, of this great continent of Europe. Though I was young, and though my knowledge of English was very insufficient, yet I had heard of her great poets and her heroes, of the ideal Europe of literature, so full of the love of freedom and of humanity.

Italy was my first introduction to Europe. In those days the steamers stopped at Brindisi, and I still remember, when we reached the port, it was midnight under a full moon. I came rushing up on deck from my bed, and shall never forget

that marvellous scene, enveloped in the silent mystery of the moonlight—the sight of Europe asleep, like a maiden dreaming of beauty and peace.~

It was fortunate for me that Brindisi was a small town, a quiet place, not so aggressively different from the scenes to which I had been accustomed from my childhood. I felt sure that its heart was open to me, to welcome the boy poet, who though young was even in those days a dreamer. I was greatly elated as I left the steamer to pass the night in what I suppose in these days of progress would be termed a third-rate hotel, having no electric light or other conveniences. I felt that I was in the arms of this great mother Europe and my heart seemed to feel the warmth of her breast.

The next day I woke and, with my brother and an Indian friend, wandered into an orchard close by, a garden of paradise which threatened no punishment against trespassers. Ah, what delight I had that morning in the limpid sunlight, in the hospitality of leaf and fruit and flower! There was an Italian girl there, who reminded me of our Indian maidens, with eyes dark like bees, which have the power to explore the secret honey-cells of love in the lotus of our hearts. (You know, with us the lotus is the emblem of the heart.) She was a simple girl with a coloured kerchief round her head and a complexion not too white. That is, it was not a pallid lack of complexion. (I wish to be forgiven when I say that the complexion of whiteness is the complexion of the desert, not the complexion of life.) Hers was like that of a bunch of grapes

caressed by the warm kisses of the sun, the sun which had modulated the beauty of her face, giving it a tender bloom.

I need not dwell at length upon the feelings I experienced ; it is enough to say that I was of the impressionable age of seventeen. I felt that I had come to a land of beauty, of repose and joy, which even at that time inspired my mind with the idea that one day I should claim its welcome for me.

With me it was a case of love at first sight ; but for my companions it was but a fleeting moment, so that I was not free to stay, but had to continue the journey with my brother, who wanted me to hasten to my lessons in English. Being a truant by nature, I had always refused to attend my classes, and thus having become a problem to my elders, they had decided to send me to England to learn under compulsion the language which, according to their notion, would give me the stamp of respectability.

England is a great country, and I pay my homage to the greatness of her people, but I must be excused if I did not appreciate it at the moment. For an Indian boy such as I was, left there alone in the depth of winter when the birds were silent and the sun so miserly with its gifts, the country seemed on every side like a visible spirit of rude refusal. I was homesick and extremely shy. I was frightened at the sombrely dressed people who stared at me. From my lodging-house, facing Regent's Park, I would gaze with a feeling of bewilderment at its



monotony of leaflessness through the mists, the fogs, and the drizzle. In a word, I was young—too young to enter into the spirit of England at that time. I merely glanced at the surface of things with my distracted heart always yearning for its own nest across the sea.

After a few months' stay, I went back home to India. But I dare not here give a recital of my idle days which followed to those of you who are young, and for whom the example of a studiously strenuous life of usefulness would perhaps be more beneficial. I avoided all kinds of educational training that could give me any sort of standardized culture stamped with a university degree. I dreamt, wrote verses, stories and plays, lived in solitude on the banks of the Ganges, and hardly knew anything of the movements and counter-movements of forces in the great world.

Whilst I was in the midst of my creative work, there came to me an inner message asking me to come out of my seclusion and seek life in the heart of the crowd. I knew not what I could do. I had a love for children, so that I called them round me, in order to rescue them from the dismal dungeons of the educational department, and find for them that atmosphere of sympathy and freedom which they needed most. I chose a beautiful and secluded spot where, in collaboration with Mother Nature, it was possible to bring up these boys in a spirit of wisdom and love.

While I was still busy doing service to children I do not know what possessed me all of a sudden.

From some far-away sky came to me a call of pilgrimage reminding me that we are all born pilgrims—pilgrims of this green earth. A voice questioned me : ‘Have you been to the sacred shrine where Divinity reveals itself in the thoughts and dreams and deeds of Man?’ I thought possibly it was in Europe where I must seek it and know the full meaning of my birth as a human being in this world. And so for the second time I came to this continent.

But, meanwhile, I had grown up and learnt much of the history of man. I had sighed with the great poet Wordsworth, who became sad when he saw what man had done to man. We too have suffered at the hands of man—not tigers and snakes, not elemental forces of nature, but human beings. Men are ever the greatest enemy of Man. I had felt and known it ; all the same, there was a hope, deep in my heart, that I should find some place, some temple, where the immortal spirit of man dwelt hidden like the sun behind clouds.

Yet, when I arrived in the land of my quest, I could not stop the insistent question which kept troubling me with a sense of despair : ‘Why is it that Europe with all her power of mind is racked with unrest ? How is it that she is overcome with such a whirlwind of suspicion and jealousy and greed ? Why is it that her greatness itself offers a vast field for fiercely contending passions to have their devil-dance in the lurid light of conflagration ?’

When I travelled from Italy to Calais I saw the beautiful scenery on both sides of the railway.

These men, I thought, have the ability to love their soil ; and what a great power is this love ! How they have beautified and made fruitful the whole continent with heroic sacrifice ! With the force of their love they have fully won their country for themselves, and this ever-active service of their devotion, for generations, has given rise in them to an irresistible power. For love is the highest human truth, and truth gives fulness of life. The earth is overwhelmed by it, not because of man's covetousness, but because of this life-giving shower of heart and mind that he has poured around him. How he has struggled to eradicate the obstinate barrenness from the inert ! How he has fought and defeated at every step the evil in everything that was hostile in his surroundings ! Why then this dark misery lowering over Europe, why this widespread menace of doom in her sky ?

Because the love for her own soil and children will no longer suffice for her. So long as destiny offered to her only a limited problem, Europe did more or less satisfactorily solve it. Her answer was patriotism, nationalism—that is to say, love only for that and those to whom she happened to be related. According to the degree of truth in this love she has reaped her harvest of welfare. But to-day, through the help of science, the whole world has been given to her for a problem. How to answer it in the fulness of truth she has yet to learn. Because the problem has become vast, the wrong answer is fraught with immense danger.

A great truth has been laid bare to you, and

according to your dealing with it you will attain the fulfilment of your destiny. If you do not have the strength to accept it in the right spirit, your humanity will rapidly degenerate ; your love of freedom, love of justice, love of truth, love of beauty, will wither at the root ; and you will be rejected of God.

Do you not realize how a rigid ugliness is everywhere apparent—in your cities, in your commerce, the same monotonous mask—so that nowhere is there room for a living expression of the spirit ? This is the creeping in of death, limb by limb, in the body of your civilization.

Love can be patient. Beauty is moulded and matured by patience. Your great artists knew it in the days when they could gladly modulate all the riches of their leisure into some tiny detail of beauty. The greedy man can never do this. Factories are the triumph of ugliness, for no one has the patience to try to give them the touch of grace ; and so, everywhere in God's world to-day, we are faced with what is called progress, a progress towards inhospitable ugliness, towards the eddy of a bottomless passion which is voracity. Can you call to mind any great voice speaking out of the human heart in these modern days ?

We have no doubt reason to be proud of Science. We offer to Europe our homage in return for her gift of science, now bequeathed to posterity. Our sages have said : ' The Infinite has to be known and realized. For man, the Infinite is the only true source of happiness.' Europe has come face

to face with the Infinite in the world of extension, the domain of external Nature.

I do not cry down the material world. I fully realize that this is the nurse and the cradle of the Spirit. By achieving the Infinite in the heart of the material world you have made this world more generous than it ever was. But merely coming to a rich fact does not give us the right to own it. The great Science which you have discovered still awaits your meriting. Through what you have gained outwardly you may become successful, but you may miss greatness in spite of the success.

Because you have strenuously cultivated your mind in Europe, because of your accuracy of observation and the development of your reasoning faculties, these discoveries you have undoubtedly deserved. But discoveries have to be realized by a complete humanity—Knowing has to be brought under the control of Being—before Truth can be fully honoured. But our Being, the fundamental reality in the human world, with which all other truths have to be brought into harmony at any cost, is not within the domain of Science. Truth when not properly treated turns back on us to destroy us. Your very science is thus becoming your destroyer.

If you have acquired a thunderbolt for yourself, you must earn the right arm of a god to be safe. You have failed to cultivate those qualities which would give you full sovereign right over science and therefore you have missed peace. You cry for peace, and only build another frightful machine, some new powerful combination. Quiet may be

imposed by outside compulsion for a time, but Peace comes from the inner spirit, from the power of sympathy, the power of self-sacrifice—not of organization.

I have great faith in humanity. Like the sun it can be clouded, but never extinguished. I admit that at this time when the human races have met together as never before, the baser elements appear predominant. The powerful are exulting at the number of their victims. They take the name of science to cultivate the schoolboy superstition that they have certain physical signs indicating their eternal right to rule, as the explosive force of the earthquake once might have claimed, with enough of evidence, its never-ending sway over the destiny of this earth. But they in their turn will be disappointed.

Theirs is the cry of a past that is already exhausted, a past that has thrived upon the exclusive spirit of national individualism which will no longer be able to keep the balance in its perpetual disharmony with its surroundings. Only those races will prosper who, for the sake of their own perfection and permanent safety, are ready to cultivate the spiritual magnanimity of mind that enables the soul of man to be realized in the heart of all races.

For men to come near to one another and yet to continue to ignore the claims of humanity is a sure process of suicide. We are waiting for the time when the spirit of the age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and the meeting of men will be translated into the Unity of Man.

I have come to your door seeking the voice of humanity, which must sound its solemn challenge and overcome the clamour of the greedy crowd of slave-drivers. Perhaps it is already being uttered in whispers behind closed doors, and will grow in volume till it bursts forth in a thundering cry of judgment, and the vulgar shout of brute force is silenced in awe.

## THE REALIZATION OF THE INFINITE <sup>1</sup>

THE Upanishads say : ' Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God ; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him.'

But what is the nature of this attainment of God ? It is quite evident that the infinite is not like one object among many, to be definitely classified and kept among our possessions, to be used as an ally specially favouring us in our politics, warfare, money-making, or in social competitions. We cannot put our God in the same list with our summer-houses, motor-cars, or our credit at the bank, as so many people seem to want to do.

We must try to understand the true character of the desire that a man has when his soul longs for his God. Does it consist of his wish to make an addition, however valuable, to his belongings ? Emphatically no ! It is an endlessly wearisome task, this continual adding to our stores. In fact, when the soul seeks God she seeks her final escape from this incessant gathering and heaping and never coming to an end. It is not an additional object that she seeks, but it is the *nityo 'nityānām*, the permanent in all that is impermanent, the *rasānām rasatamah*, the highest abiding joy unifying

<sup>1</sup> From *Sādhana*.



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all enjoyments. Therefore when the Upanishads teach us to realize everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new.

*Know everything that there is in the universe as enveloped by God. Enjoy whatever is given by him and harbour not in your mind the greed for wealth which is not your own.*

When you know that whatever there is is filled by him and whatever you have is his gift, then you realize the infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts. Then you know that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all your possessions have their only significance for you, not in themselves but in the relation they establish with the infinite.

So it cannot be said that we can find Brahma as we find other objects ; there is no question of searching for him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light ; we open our eyes and there it is ; so we need only give ourselves up to find that Brahma is everywhere.

This is the reason why Buddha admonished us to free ourselves from the confinement of the life of the self. If there were nothing else to take its place more positively perfect and satisfying, then such admonition would be absolutely unmeaning. No man can seriously consider the advice, much less have any enthusiasm for it, of surrendering everything one has for gaining nothing whatever.

So our daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love.

The Upanishads say : *Be lost altogether in Brahma like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target.* Thus to be conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahma is not an act of mere concentration of mind. It must be the aim of the whole of our life. In all our thoughts and deeds we must be conscious of the infinite. Let the realization of this truth become easier every day of our life, that *none could live or move if the energy of the all-pervading joy did not fill the sky.* In all our actions let us feel that impetus of the infinite energy and be glad.

It may be said that the infinite is beyond our attainment, so it is for us as if it were naught. Yes, if the word attainment implies any idea of possession, then it must be admitted that the infinite is unattainable. But we must keep in mind that the highest enjoyment of man is not in the having but in a getting, which is at the same time not getting. Our physical pleasures leave no margin for the unrealized. They, like the dead satellite of the earth, have but little atmosphere around them. When we take food and satisfy our hunger it is a complete act of possession. So long as the hunger is not satisfied it is a pleasure to eat. For then our enjoyment of eating touches at every point the

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infinite. But, when it attains completion, or in other words, when our desire for eating reaches the end of the stage of its non-realization, it reaches the end of its pleasure. In all our intellectual pleasures the margin is broader, the limit is far off. In all our deeper love getting and non-getting run ever parallel. In one of our Vaishnava lyrics the lover says to his beloved : ' I feel as if I have gazed upon the beauty of thy face from my birth, yet my eyes are hungry still : as if I have kept thee pressed to my heart for millions of years, yet my heart is not satisfied.'

This makes it clear that it is really the infinite whom we seek in our pleasures. Our desire for being wealthy is not a desire for a particular sum of money but it is indefinite, and the most fleeting of our enjoyments are but the momentary touches of the eternal. The tragedy of human life consists in our vain attempts to stretch the limits of things which can never become unlimited, to reach the infinite by absurdly adding to the rungs of the ladder of the finite.

It is evident from this that the real desire of our soul is to get beyond all our possessions. Surrounded by things she can touch and feel, she cries, ' I am weary of getting ; ah, where is he who is never to be got ? '

Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part with all that he

has, not excepting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings. Buddha and Jesus, and all our great prophets, represent such great ideas. They hold before us opportunities for surrendering our all. When they bring forth their divine alms-bowl we feel we cannot help giving, and we find that in giving is our truest joy and liberation, for it is uniting ourselves to that extent with the infinite.

Though the West has accepted as its teacher him who boldly proclaimed his oneness with his Father, and who exhorted his followers to be perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of our unity with the infinite being. It condemns, as a piece of blasphemy, any implication of man's becoming God. This is certainly not the idea that Christ preached, nor perhaps the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seems to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian West.

But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of our soul to *gain* God, to utilize him for any special material purpose. All that we can ever aspire to is to become more and more one with God. In the region of nature, which is the region of diversity, we grow by acquisition ; in the spiritual world, which is the region of unity, we grow by losing ourselves, by uniting. Gaining a thing, as we have said, is by its nature partial, it is limited only to a particular want ; but *being* is complete, it belongs to our wholeness, it springs

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not from any necessity but from our affinity with the infinite, which is the principle of perfection that we have in our soul.

Yes, we must become Brahma. We must not shrink to avow this. Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realize the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all.

But can it then be said that there is no difference between Brahma and our individual soul? Of course the difference is obvious. Call it illusion or ignorance, or whatever name you may give it, it is there. You can offer explanations but you cannot explain it away. Even illusion is true as illusion.

Brahma is Brahma; he is the infinite ideal of perfection. But we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation.

In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, 'I shall become the sea.' It is not a vain assumption; it is true humility, for it is the truth. The river has no other alternative. On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests, villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways, cleanse them and feed them, carry their produce from place to place. But it can have only partial relations with these, and however long it may linger among them it remains separate; it never can become a town or a forest.

But it can and does become the sea. The lesser moving water has its affinity with the great motionless water of the ocean. It moves through the thousand objects on its onward course, and its motion finds its finality when it reaches the sea.

The river can become the sea, but she can never make the sea part and parcel of herself. If, by some chance, she has encircled some broad sheet of water and pretends that she made the sea a part of herself, we at once know that it is not so, that her current is still seeking rest in the great ocean to which it can never set boundaries.

In the same manner, our soul can only become Brahma as the river can become the sea. Everything else she touches at one of her points, then leaves and moves on, but she never can leave Brahma and move beyond him. Once our soul realizes her ultimate object of repose in Brahma, all her movements acquire a purpose. It is this ocean of infinite rest which gives significance to endless activities. It is this perfectness of being that lends to the imperfection of becoming that quality of beauty which finds its expression in all poetry, drama, and art.

There must be a complete idea that animates a poem. Every sentence of the poem touches that idea. When the reader realizes that pervading idea, as he reads on, then the reading of the poem is full of joy to him. Then every part of the poem becomes radiantly significant by the light of the whole. But if the poem goes on interminably, never expressing the idea of the whole, only throwing off disconnected

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images, however beautiful, it becomes wearisome and unprofitable in the extreme. The progress of our soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realized makes all movements full of meaning and joy. But if we detach its movements from that ultimate idea, if we do not see the infinite rest and only see the infinite motion, then existence appears to us a monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness.

I remember in our childhood we had a teacher who used to make us learn by heart the whole book of Sanskrit grammar, which is written in symbols, without explaining their meaning to us. Day after day we went toiling on, but on towards what, we had not the least notion. So, as regards our lessons, we were in the position of the pessimist who only counts the breathless activities of the world, but cannot see the infinite repose of the perfection whence these activities are gaining their equilibrium every moment in absolute fitness and harmony. We lose all joy in thus contemplating existence, because we miss the truth. We see the gesticulations of the dancer, and we imagine these are directed by a ruthless tyranny of chance, while we are deaf to the eternal music which makes every one of these gestures inevitably spontaneous and beautiful. These motions are ever growing into that music of perfection, becoming one with it, dedicating to that melody at every step the multitudinous forms they go on creating.

And this is the truth of our soul, and this is her joy, that she must ever be growing into Brahma,

that all her movements should be modulated by this ultimate idea, and all her creations should be given as offerings to the supreme spirit of perfection.

There is a remarkable saying in the Upanishads : *I think not that I know him well, or that I know him, or even that I know him not.*

By the process of knowledge we can never know the infinite being. But if he is altogether beyond our reach, then he is absolutely nothing to us. The truth is that we know him not, yet we know him.

This has been explained in another saying of the Upanishads : *From Brahma words come back baffled, as well as the mind, but he who knows him by the joy of him is free from all fears.*

Knowledge is partial, because our intellect is an instrument ; it is only a part of us ; it can give us information about things which can be divided and analysed, and whose properties can be classified, part by part. But Brahma is perfect, and knowledge which is partial can never be a knowledge of him.

But he can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness ; it is knowing by our whole being. Intellect sets us apart from the things to be known, but love knows its object by fusion. Such knowledge is immediate and admits no doubt. It is the same as knowing our own selves, only more so.

Therefore, as the Upanishads say, mind can never know Brahma, words can never describe him ; he can only be known by our soul, by her joy in him, by her love. Or in other words, we can only come into relation with him by union—union of our whole



being. We must be one with our Father, we must be perfect as he is.

But how can that be ? There can be no grade in infinite perfection. We cannot grow more and more into Brahma. He is the absolute one, and there can be no more or less in him.

Indeed, the realization of the *paramātman*, the supreme soul, within our *antarātman*, our inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion. We cannot think of it as non-existent and depending on our limited powers for its gradual construction. If our relation with the divine were all a thing of our own making, how should we rely on it as true, and how should it lend us support ?

Yes, we must know that within us we have that where space and time cease to rule and where the links of evolution are merged in unity. In that everlasting abode of the *ātman*, the soul, the revelation of the *paramātman*, the supreme soul, is already complete. Therefore the Upanishads say : *He who knows Brahma, the true, the all-conscious, and the infinite as hidden in the depths of the soul, which is the supreme sky (the inner sky of consciousness), enjoys all objects of desire in union with the all-knowing Brahma.*

The union is already accomplished. The *param-ātman*, the supreme soul, has himself chosen this soul of ours as his bride and the marriage has been completed. The solemn *mantram*<sup>1</sup> has been uttered : *Let thy heart be even as my heart is.* There is no room in this marriage for evolution to act the part

<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit for incantation, spell.

of the master of ceremonies. The *eshah*, who cannot otherwise be described than as *This*, the nameless immediate presence, is ever here in our innermost being. 'This *eshah*, or *This*, is the supreme end of the other this'; 'this *This* is the supreme treasure of the other this'; 'this *This* is the supreme dwelling of the other this'; 'this *This* is the supreme joy of the other this.' Because the marriage of supreme love has been accomplished in timeless time. And now goes on the endless *lila*,<sup>1</sup> the play of love. He who has been gained in eternity is now being pursued in time and space, in joys and sorrows, in this world and in the worlds beyond. When the soul-bride understands this well, her heart is blissful and at rest. She knows that she, like a river, has attained the ocean of her fulfilment at one end of her being, and at the other end she is ever attaining it; at one end it is eternal rest and completion, at the other it is incessant movement and change. When she knows both ends as inseparably connected, then she knows the world as her own household by the right of knowing the master of the world as her own lord. Then all her services become services of love, all the troubles and tribulations of life come to her as trials triumphantly borne to prove the strength of her love, smilingly to win the wager from her lover. But so long as she remains obstinately in the dark, lifts not her veil, does not recognize her lover, and only knows the world dissociated from him, she serves as a handmaid here, where by right she

<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit for sport or play.

might reign as a queen ; she sways in doubt, and weeps in sorrow and dejection. *She passes from starvation to starvation, from trouble to trouble, and from fear to fear.*

I can never forget that scrap of a song I once heard in the early dawn in the midst of the din of the crowd that had collected for a festival the night before : ' Ferryman, take me across to the other shore ! '

In the bustle of all our work there comes out this cry, ' Take me across.' The carter in India sings while driving his cart, ' Take me across.' The itinerant grocer deals out his goods to his customers and sings, ' Take me across.'

What is the meaning of this cry ? We feel we have not reached our goal ; and we know with all our striving and toiling we do not come to the end, we do not attain our object. Like a child dissatisfied with its dolls, our heart cries, ' Not this, not this.' But what is that other ? Where is the further shore ?

Is it something else than what we have ? Is it somewhere else than where we are ? Is it to take rest from all our works, to be relieved from all the responsibilities of life ?

No, in the very heart of our activities we are seeking for our end. We are crying for the across, even where we stand. So, while our lips utter their prayer to be carried away, our busy hands are never idle.

In truth, thou ocean of joy, this shore and the other shore are one and the same in thee. When

I call this my own, the other lies estranged ; and missing the sense of that completeness which is in me, my heart incessantly cries out for the other. All my this, and that other, are waiting to be completely reconciled in thy love.

This 'I' of mine toils hard, day and night, for a home which it knows as its own. Alas, there will be no end of its sufferings so long as it is not able to call this home thine. Till then it will struggle on, and its heart will ever cry, 'Ferryman, lead me across.' When this home of mine is made thine, that very moment is it taken across, even while its old walls enclose it. This 'I' is restless. It is working for a gain which can never be assimilated with its spirit, which it never can hold and retain. In its efforts to clasp in its own arms that which is for all, it hurts others and is hurt in its turn, and cries, 'Lead me across.' But as soon as it is able to say, 'All my work is thine,' everything remains the same, only it is taken across.

Where can I meet thee unless in this mine home made thine ? Where can I join thee unless in this my work transformed into thy work ? If I leave my home I shall not reach thy home ; if I cease my work I can never join thee in thy work. For thou dwellest in me and I in thee. Thou without me or I without thee are nothing.

*THE RIGHT HON. H. H. ASQUITH*

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